The Glimpse

Arnold Bennett

ALEKTRYAINA

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edited by Ross G. Arthur

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Book I

Chapter I : The Concert

I passed from the street between two lackeys who might have been the lackeys of Marie Antoinette into the curtained and velvety calm of those vast suites which a merchant designed in order to flatter the lust of eyes like mine. Plush on the wide silent floors, Indian-red tapestry on the walls, and through each draped doorway confusing and spacious vistas. The woodwork, the bronze fittings, the crystal stalactites, the moulded plaster—all showed curious, elaborate craftsmanship. Hundreds of artisans in soiled smocks must have laboured for months with dirty, offensive hands to produce that sedate splendour. But they were all gone, all hurried out of sight; and of the under-world only a gloved servility in immaculate hose had been retained. In spite of yourself you had the illusion that some powerful wand must have waved the place into sudden and complete existence. A retreat for the dilettante, a refuge where he might be secure from the disconcerting aggression of inharmonious phenomena! A temple!

A turnstile clicked me into the central hall, under whose dome the concert had been arranged. Opaline stuffs, ballooning downwards from the dome, changed the sunlight into silver. Hung about the large room were forty paintings by Charles Conder, which I had already seen. A Conder exhibition had closed on the previous day. It was an exquisitely luxurious idea: abasing those pictures, each a marvel of intricate and lovely fancy, to be the background of music. Conceive, in the expectant hush, the gleaming Bechstein piano with its lid pointing upwards, the rows of gilt chairs, empty or occupied, the border of floor, and then the ring of Charles Conder's women voluptuously brooding in their weak but eternal beauty amidst impossible landscapes of ivory, lavender and rose.

A pianist began to play the "Miroirs" of Ravel. (It was this name, on the programme of a concert of modern French music, which had drawn me from the pavement of Bond Street into the Rutland Galleries.) The first of the 'mirrors' in which Ravel reflected the extreme originality of his sensations was called "Night Moths." Before these strange insects had been flitting enigmatically about the room for even a couple of minutes they seemed to have chosen a special victim in the person of an

old man with a small, thin face and a short white beard who sat near to me. He shrugged his shoulders; he emitted inarticulate scorn through his nose. His resentment then forced itself into words. He muttered:

"Morbid!"

And later, in a loud tone that attracted attention:

"Ridiculous! What next, I wonder!"

And as the night moths fluttered to rest amidst timid applause, he rose as if in a paroxysm of holy anger, snatched his hat from under the gilt chair, and strode out, snorting protests. People turned to gaze at him an instant, mildly and politely shocked that a human being should exhibit so much feeling about naught. But I liked that old man, and sympathized with him, because he had wandered with brave curiosity into the wrong generation. Moreover, he had made me sure that Ravel was saying something powerful and beautiful in its originality. Only real power and beauty could have so quickly flung that honest, obstinate old man into the street. He would have laughed easily at pretences and held his ground.

"Mournful Birds," "A Bark on the Ocean," "The Valley of Bells"—: these were names of other of the 'mirrors.' What clever things might be written in comparing, for instance, Ravel's birds with the 'plaintive warblers' of François Couperin, two centuries earlier! But I am not now composing another musical treatise. The tragic grief of the birds, the febrile and yet majestic furrowing of that singular bark, the evasive sweetness of bells in a most sinister valley—yes, I could describe these matters; but to no end save the extension of my own personality. Music cannot be said. One art cannot be translated into another. All that I can say is that I was aware of another step in the art of music, towards the ultimate realism, the ultimate conquest of a refractory medium. I had heard music as beautiful. I had heard music which to me was more beautiful. But I had never heard music in which the twelve unchangeable semitones of the octave—sole material of all our music—were so tenderly, so harshly, so cruelly, so brilliantly teased, cajoled, and whipped into the subtle curves of an exceedingly complex temperament. My wonder was, and the wonder of every musician would be, "How did he manage to write it down? How did he express it in notes?" For it appeared to be indivisible into its constituent notes. He had carried musical expression further than anybody had carried it. He had done

that. Wagner, one used to hear, had dealt music such a blow that she must lie henceforward motionless forever. So she had lain, stunned, until Debussy came and revived her by persuading her that Wagner was a fable and had never lived. Debussy had created a new beauty, and here was Ravel, swift on his heels, creating still another and a newer beauty, communicating a thrill stranger than any thrill! I exulted in this birth. I exulted in the acute distinction, the aristocratic audacity, the baffling obscurity of this ruthless and soft music. I thought how fine and glorious it was to hear these sounds now for the first time heard in London. I could have cried angrily to the audience: "Shout, for the immortal spirit of beauty has passed into another incarnation, and you before all others in this city have witnessed the advent!"

Chapter II : The Public

But the applause at the end of the suite of pieces was even fainter than it had been after the first number. The proudly demure minister of beauty rose from the piano and bowed to a tremulous and feeble clapping which expired at once as though afraid even of itself. And the pianist sat down quickly. I did not applaud, because I never do applaud, my feelings not being readily expressible in violent movements of my hands and feet. Moreover, even if I had had time to decide to protest by noise against the general indifference, the protest would have been worse than useless, for it would have given emphasis to that awful tepidity. After the lovely confusing sound of the piano, and the little April shower of perfunctory clapping, there was silence. There was almost stillness. People seemed afraid even to whisper to each other lest in the intimacy of the domed room everybody might overhear. We sat glum and self-conscious, waiting. My lips curled savagely. The public had failed again. The public had displayed again its incurable qualities of dullness, unreceptiveness, suspiciousness, and fright. (And yet this was a picked public, a choice handful! No common public would have put itself to the trouble of coming to listen to music clearly labelled modern, by composers of whom it had scarcely heard. I was indeed among persons who possessed in some degree the divine gift of curiosity.) Oh! the terrible unresponsive inertia of the well-intentioned and faithful Anglo-Saxon public! Oh! incomparably blind and deaf! The old fight would have to begin afresh, and it would have to pass through all the usual

stages. And then, when it was done and the vanquished public was ecstatically kissing the feet of its conqueror, lo! the battle would recommence yet again. My lips curled with the intensity of disgust. I preferred the snorting old man who would not tolerate the music at all to this prim apathy. The immense melancholy which for a year past had been creeping over me seemed suddenly to lay its heavy folds closer upon me. My exultation in the genius of the music remained, but it was transformed into something grim and bitter.

A whispering occurred among the performers at the end of the room. The concert was conducted with a certain informality, and the artistes, instead of going in and out, sat at the back, like a group of priests. Evidently, now, a contretemps of some kind had arisen. I saw the solo pianist sitting by himself, and nervously stroking his pointed French beard. I got up from my chair at the end of a row and went to him and bluntly asked him for the name of the publisher of the music which he had just played. I could easily have obtained the information otherwise, but perhaps my soul was forcing me to express in some strange, abrupt, hard English way my sympathy with his mission in that place.

"Pardon me," he replied nervously in a low tone, and with a strong foreign accent. "Have I the honour of speaking to Mr. Morrice Loring?"

"Yes," I said stiffly.

He bowed. So did I. Then he picked up a piece of music from the next chair, scribbled on it feverishly with a fountain pen, and handed it to me in a sort of religious fervour. It was the "Miroirs" of Ravel, with a dedication to myself from Ravel's interpreter.

"Deign to accept," he murmured.

I could not argue, for the delay in the concert, whatever it was, had ended, and a young woman was rising to sing. I thanked my donor as adequately as I could in the time and circumstances, and stole back to my seat. Only two years ago, how such a recognition, especially from a foreigner, would have touched and delighted me! Five years ago I should almost have regarded it as the crown of a career. But now it did not in the least move me. I thought the man's eagerness rather childish, rather pitiful, rather absurd. I felt that his sense of values was wrong, and that he knew more of the piano than of life. I did not even puzzle my head to conjecture how he had come to be aware of my identity.

Chapter III : A Final Perfection

The young woman was an American, advertised as a pupil of Jean de Reszke. She seemed to be a highly finished article, as she stood there, expectantly smiling, with her back to the piano and her arms thrust somewhat behind, widely aslant, so that the curved fingers rested on the piano. Such a pose must have been carefully thought out and long practised, to the least detail. Her frock and hat, her gloves, the line of her neck-chain, had all been the subject of deep consideration. She had an agreeable platform voice, mezzo-soprano, which had been admirably trained and developed, and a perfect French accent. My mind, as I listened to her, dwelt on the ten thousand hours during which her voice must have run up and down on scales, in warm months and in cold months, always the same, exasperating the neighbour in the flat above or the flat below: and on the weariness of the piano and of the accompanist, and on the recurrent excitation of lesson-days; and on the intrigues and schemes for success; and on the visits to dressmakers and modistes and coiffeurs, and the continual pathetic effort to stretch money a little further than money will in fact stretch; and again on the schemes, and again the schemes; and the absurd, wild hopes; and the days of discouragement. In that moment she was at fruition. It was to be able to stand up graceful and elegant there, and pour pretty sounds from the vase of her body, that she had toiled upon herself, and others had toiled upon her, for a decade and perhaps more. Five minutes, and she had done! Interminable cultivation, endless effort for five minutes of formal display! A few vibrations, a glance, a smile, a gesture; and she had done all that she could do. Once a week, once a month, possibly less often, she lived for five minutes!

And it was all useless. She sang a foolish song of Gustave Charpentier's—a song born dead—and she sang it sentimentally; she liked the song, bathing in its sickly vapours. She had learned everything that could be taught, and nothing that was worth learning without the original gift which she did not possess. This fruition of hers was bad; it was unrighteous. Those neighbours had been exasperated for worse than naught during all those long years. And she did not know; she never would know. She stood there in her simple guile, and in her expert accomplishment, wistfully trusting in the efficacy of her power. In that she was justified. Before the last chords of the accompaniment had been

played, the audience, impatient to express its delight, frothed into an elegant but sincere applause.

"Sweet!" one heard.

And it was; too sweet.

Her eyes sparkled as she bowed. For such instants as this she existed. Her existence was a series of ascents to, and descents from, such instants as this. She dreamed, I knew, of more brilliant successes. But she would never have them. She lacked temperament. She was merely the accidental possessor of a small, agreeable, highly trained mezzo-soprano voice. On a stage, in a great hall, with an orchestra, she would be extinguished.

I shrank from the rest of the programme, and departed, gloomy, but still grimly exultant about the art of Ravel, the impression of whose music I wished to preserve unmingled with any other impressions. Already the Charpentier had contaminated it. A woman and her cavalier left at the same time, but perhaps for a different reason. She was young, radiant, beautiful, arrogant, and marvellously clad. She, at any rate, was under no compulsion to stretch money; clearly she had command over a gushing source of gold. The cavalier was oldish, elaborately dandiacal, with white spats, a white border to the opening of his waistcoat, and the false spryness of the ageing beau. The woman hesitated for a fraction of a second in front of a Charles Conder near the door, and raised a long-handled lorgnon to her black and haughty eyes.

"Pretty thing!" she observed nonchalantly, and passed on.

Charles Conder had fulfilled his mission in her busy, bird-like life.

As they crossed the acre of plush that separated the dome from the street, they talked of a hotel at Pontresina, in their high, hard voices. At the porch an automobile, glittering as though jewelled, and as large as a tramcar, came up with the silence of a ghost. The chauffeur, staring contemptuously in front of him, ignored even this queen. A lackey opened the door of the vehicle, and she stepped delicately in, while the dandy stood bareheaded. The door clicked, and again in silence the glittering and immense contrivance swept wondrously away. The dandy replaced his hat, glanced down to see if his necktie was behaving itself, smiled, and strutted off. The lackeys resumed their immobility.

"There, anyhow," I thought, "was the last word, the final perfection, of something!"

Chapter IV : Bond Street

Flags were waving in Bond Street, from staffs perpendicular on the roofs, and from staffs horizontal on the façades. They waved continually in the sunlit breeze as though they were a natural and necessary expression of the triumphant glory of Bond Street, demonstrating that there was nothing like Bond Street in the world. And probably there was not. Next door to the Rutland Galleries was exposed a collection of leather goods to which had contributed every known quadruped with a hide to his back. Gazing into those large and crowded windows one was convinced that no activity of human existence could be correctly carried on without leather mounted in silver or gold. One could not mark the hour nor the day of the month, nor the year, without leather; nor strike a match, nor eat a sandwich on the moor, nor write a letter, nor pray to God, nor use a mirror, nor gird one's loins, nor identify one's dog nor one's cat nor even one's self, nor smoke a cigarette, nor give a fiver to a lady, without this indispensable leather. It was less an adaptation of leather to life than an adaptation of life to leather. An astounding relentless ingenuity had expended itself in forcing life into a mould of leather, and fitting it there exactly. And through the glassy portal one glimpsed vistas of more leather gleaming with silver and gold, of leather put to odder and still more odd uses, receding inward far into the entrails of London. Boots alone were missing from the menagerie: doubtless an oversight, a temporary failure of the creative ingenuity. A gilded legend on the window showed that this remarkable house had existed since 1727, and that the crowned heads of Europe availed themselves of its cleverness in order to reign in leather.

The next house contradicted this one, and proved that precious stones were the basis of a proper conception of life, that life was impossible from morn to eve without precious stones. Behind the windows cave succeeded cave of precious stones into the entrails of London. The second house, too, had been established in the eighteenth century, and it was written that the princes of the earth furnished their diadems there. And these two houses were squeezed close together, so that only a brick separated lapiz-lazuli from alligators. For in Bond Street the wealth exceeds the space. After precious stones came orchestras and seats for theatres and operas, packed close against the stones. And then cigars and cigarettes, nothing but cigars and cigarettes, the largest cigars

and smallest cigarettes, the largest cigarettes and smallest cigars that fancy had ever fashioned. And then suddenly, without the waste of an inch, life became a range of neckties, and naught in this world or the next mattered except the colour and knotting of a necktie. And then, in a great building, with a mosaic pavement in front of it, and a name over it illustrious beyond the names of kings,—the frock of the odalisque, sacred, mysterious, awful, consummate, ineffable: a shrine guarded by heroes wearing medals! And to placate the high ministrants of the shrine seemed now to be the supreme privilege of the male. And then whips and spurs! And then heads of hair! And then little cakes and sweets, a rood of them vanishing dimly into the entrails of London. And then engravings after Leonardo da Vinci and after Mr. Cecil Aldin! And then leather again! Three quarters of a serried mile up, and three quarters of a serried mile down: all the houses depending on each other for support, and waving to each other messages of the luxury and splendour of an unrivalled civilisation! And equipages compromising with equipages in the narrow defile; and moguls, incas, pro-consuls, eunuchs, usurers, sultanas, houris, mandarinesses, and serious ladies getting in and out of the equipages, and in and out of the shops, serene in the consciousness that there was nothing more correct than this, and that in the whole street not a single necessary of life could be discovered!

Chapter V : The Malady

Nor did I see any necessary of life in my slow and melancholy promenade to Hyde Park Corner. Into the Park I carried my causeless, my improper gloom, and also my grim satisfaction in the fact that Ravel had created a new beauty which no neglect could wither. And I was amazed and overwhelmed, as a hundred times before, by the effulgent, teeming, entangled display of sensual luxury which the Ladies' Mile presented. Welter of horses' heads that a bearing-rein reminded to nod proudly; gloss of harness and of hide and of panels; surging of pale gauzes over cushions, and over the bosoms of women who reclined almost horizontally indolent; flowering of monstrous hats and chromatic expansion of parasols; domination of automata in livery: all that jammed and huddled together, packed so tight that when one hoof moved all must move and a pulsation at the Achilles statue was felt instantly at Albert Gate! And the crowds driving other crowds like

loitering sheep in the sidewalks, all staring and being stared at, all affecting indifference in the affliction of self-consciousness. And the battalions couched on multitudinous chairs, staring, staring! And here and there large, flat, unpopulated expanses of glowing flowers, every blossom separately tended and encouraged to be at once orderly and brilliant; and swards, shaved and ironed every day into a fresh perfection! And then the great trees, climbing powerfully upwards into the heights of the yellow sky, and there breaking into a rich crown of heavy, dark foliage. And beyond the trees, cantering horsemen, and more trees and lawns! See it all heavily and yet ardently alive in a haze of dust under he implacable July sun! Hear, without, the faint immense rumble of London flowing on its ways, there where the houses form precipices on which painters and plasterers dangle!

I saw it as imperial, as still the crest and summit of empire. In spite of something called democracy, and something else called finance, the ancient ruling class of England still in the main ruled here. The faces and the gestures behind those horses were unmistakable and inimitable. They could not be copied in a century nor in two. And they were regnant. When the drawling and controlled voices said, with emotion, 'England,' they meant themselves. They were the excuse for England, what England had to show for itself to the planet; and England was still conducted to the ends of what they considered their advantage. That which had always impressed me most about them and their parasites, counterfeits, and dependants, was the enormity of the physical apparatus with which they had encumbered mere existence, the complexity of it and the costliness. They were helpless without slaves, and yet they had abolished slavery. There were ten thousand wheels in my sight, and they all had to be washed every day. And that was nothing. There were hordes of women in my sight who must stand limp every six hours while other women hooked clothes round their bodies. And every soul within view, even to the coachman, required for every act of his life a special instrument which itself necessitated tremendous labour. The cockades on shiny hats were not ready-made till they reached the shop-counter; and someone had put together with an optic glass the delicate carriage-clocks; and someone else had polished and stitched the leather in which to enclose them. And what virgins, or what mothers, had bent head on breast for a whole day and a whole life to embroider the

monograms without which cambric handkerchiefs could not rightly be employed!

No wonder that space was so precious in Bond Street and in the slums! I saw in my mind all the black-robed girls that enter Bond Street early and leave it late, 'assisting' all day, deep in the entrails of London, and acquiring steadily the virtues of sweetness, patience, fortitude, and resignation. And I saw the workshops crammed with stuffs, and seamers and seamstresses, and inspectors ever arising and descending to insure that death was not therein outrageously rampant. And I saw another ring of homes, where a gross of boxes were made for a farthing, and two shirts for ten farthings, and where a woman might work for a hundred hours and not earn enough to buy a Porterhouse steak. And I saw also a vast foreign army muttering every language but English in the basements and attics of hotels and restaurants, an army recruited from mountain sides and lake shores to cook food and put it into the very mouths of the oligarchy. And I saw the factoried provinces, under smoke, and drilled to labour more ruthlessly than if the factories had been barracks. And I saw the coal-mine; and the bakery. And then again I saw Hyde Park.

"How crude and facile all these contrasts and juxtapositions are!" I thought.

And they were. But they surged irrepressibly up, out of my melancholy, and reacted on it, increasing it. Yet I think my melancholy might have been cured if I could have seen any happiness inscribed on the faces that passed before me. I was ready to regard suffering as a phenomenon, scientifically; and I would have pardoned, would have justified, the cruelty, the negligence, the egotism of these processional persons, if only they had got value for their fierce deeds, if only they had achieved some sort of bliss. They had not. They had failed. They were all sad. They had the sadness of brutes, who know not why they are sad. All the injustice, all the oppression, all the sighing of the victims, was wasted. The rulers had done nothing but complicate their lives in an endless ritual of physical grossness, which was entirely futile. They weighed their bodies on a machine every morning, and thought to be happy! They were still, with the heroic obstinacy of ignorance, searching for happiness where it was impossible that happiness should be. Their case was as desperate as the most desperate.

Nor was the case of the enlightened any better. The faces under the Rutland dome, surrounded and caressed by beauty, fine faces many of them, made fine by a deliberate and long withdrawal from that which is gross and unseemly, spiritualised by mystic contacts with the immaterial,—were these faces less mournful? Was my own?

I was forty-two years of age, and in possession of what I had all my life up to about forty, instinctively and without questioning, considered to be the essentials of happiness. When young and harassed by the gaps in my equipment and the imperfections of my technique, I used to say to myself: "If only I could achieve some really large and important critical work, full of knowledge and also of emotion, I should be content—content with the mere achievement." But when after ten years of devotion, I finished "The Development of European Music" to the scale of three large volumes, and knew that it was good, my satisfaction did not endure a day, not an hour. I said: "This must be published. This must be recognised for what it is. And I must be admitted to be what I surely am. Then I shall be content." And I could not find a publisher for three years. But when I found a publisher—and among the most august—and the work was issued, and accepted as a masterpiece and unique, and genuinely bought and sold in addition to being discussed at dinner-tables, and translated into German, French, Italian, and even Russian, and scarcely a day closed on which I was not the subject of some truly distinguished flattery,—my satisfaction did not endure a week. And I said to myself: "Is this all? Is this all it is?" And bent myself to another work, as it were to a forlorn hope. And when my half-brother died in Indianapolis, and the sudden ownership of three hundred thousand dollars' worth of interest-yielding valuables rescued me generously and for ever from the annoyances due to an insufficient and unsure income, I was no nearer content, though I could give myself with much more completeness to the study of beauty. I had the consciousness of immense and successful endeavour, of being unsurpassed in my sphere; I had fame; I had wealth. I had, above all, my senses exquisitely trained to the perception of beauty. In brief, my ambitions were realised, and my desires were appeased, except the vague and paramount longing, now numb, now acute, for happiness. I perceived that I had never, no never, been happy, nor made an approach toward happiness. I had mistaken the road to happiness. I was far on the wrong path, and could not trace

the right one on any map. Nevertheless, my health was sound, and remorse for sins was not among my discomforts.

I pitied the tragic haughtiness of the human beings in the spectacle before me, in that they sought happiness on the material plane instead of the spiritual. But had I found it on the spiritual? I was the saddest soul in Hyde Park; and the very crudity of my revolt shocked me into a darker melancholy. I could not envisage the whole problem. I knew that everything I thought, in relation to the problem, was crude. I talked sardonically of the oligarchy—and I belonged to it! The roots of my daily life sprang from it. I, too, sucked the blood of the humble.... Sell all that I had and give to the poor, then? No, my crudity was not so crass as that. I knew that I could only dissociate myself from the universal crime by suicide, and I had neither the wish nor the will for suicide.

Never had I felt the ravage of my malady so keenly as on that gorgeous and spectacular afternoon. And the immediate cause of the last and worst crisis? Nothing but the failure of a select gathering to respond, upon the instant, to the obscure appeal of a new form and revelation of beauty! From such a common disappointment, I had passed, by swift, illogical stages, into an overwhelming sense of the universal absurd and mournful futility of things, a mood against which my faith in that beauty grimly battled in vain. The inadequacy of the cause proved only that my malady was gaining on me; perhaps it was gaining upon the world. And my malady was the celebrated malady of existence.

Chapter VI : The Retreat

Palace Court Mansions: this feudal name added to the monetary value of the premises where I abode. It is singular how the governing class likes to pretend by mendacious street signs that it is servile. Palace Court Mansions were not within a thousand yards of a palace. Nor were they mansions, but rather in design a barracks. In other respects they were well enough, dignified in architecture, and situate in a fine, tree-shaded square. Mysterious haunt—full of mysteries! In the gloom of a marble entrance hall, a scornful, fat janissary whose cap-touching was the merest perfunctory concession to our prejudices, stalked about in a shining uniform. I had never seen that janissary do anything but stalk about. A tiny boy, dressed in a ludicrous exact imitation of the janissary, ushered me into an electric-lighted box, and the box and the boy and

I shot upward with disconcerting swiftness. The boy spent all his days in swiftly shooting up and down in the box: we had caught him, and thus we were preparing him for the struggles and responsibilities of manhood. I was thrown out of the box on to a hanging gallery in front of a door numbered 45C. To me that door was different from all the other doors. It was sacred. It was my door. When with my key I opened it, and disappeared, shutting it behind me, none might follow, not even the august inhabitants of palaces. Through that door I passed from the hard, neutral, meaningless publicity of the echoing gallery suddenly into an intimate calm seclusion, where every object, every form, every colour, was arranged to express and extend my individuality. As soon, as I had closed the door I could hear the soft ticking of a grandfather's clock that in the square vestibule marked not time, but eternity. Its rosewood matched the chairs, which, never sat on, reposed in idleness on a carpet as old and distinguished as themselves. On three white walls of the vestibule were three drawings by Henry Ospovat. A tall, thin girl was in the act of putting a brown paper parcel on a small rosewood table that stood between the two chairs. She lifted her head.

"Nice and cool here, Marion," I said genially, "compared to the outside!" If my nature had not been so secretive, I might have said to her, instead: "Fellow-creature, what is your own personal solution of this vast enigma?"

She smiled primly, defensively.

"Yes, sir," in a poor little voice that indicated a feeble constitution.

She wore dark spectacles over a salient nose. It had been a question whether, with these disfiguring spectacles, she could be allowed the privilege of gaining a livelihood in Palace Court Mansions. However, right feeling, reinforced by the difficulty of replacing her, had conquered. Her face was pale and her shoulders stooped. She donned blue-and-white in the morning and black-and-white in the afternoon, and always there was a small white linen blossom in her pale hair, called a cap, though it was not a cap. Once she had forgotten to crown herself with this symbol, and, perceiving the omission in a mirror in my dining-room, had blushed red and ran gawkily out. This was the only occasion on which I saw her under the influence of deep emotion. A girl not physically seductive. As to the qualities of her mind, I knew little. She had been living in my apartments for months; in fact, she appeared to be

always there, to be permanently fixed in them fifty feet above the level of the earth. But I did not even know whether she worshiped one god or three, whether she loved or was loved, whether she was in happiness or despair. I did not even know her surname. All I knew was that she was called Marion and wore spectacles, and that in a general way she must not address me until I addressed her, and must never contradict me. And she had a companion more recondite than herself; a being of whom I caught glimpses perhaps once a week, whose aim seemed to be to recede always before me.

"What is that parcel?" I asked.

Marion held it up.

"It's just come, sir."

I guessed from the label what it was.

"Will you kindly unwrap it and put it on my study table?"

"Yes, sir. There's a telephone message for you, sir."

"Thanks. You might put this music on the piano, will you? And take my hat."

She disburdened me and noiselessly disappeared behind a curtain. I went to the telephone, behind another curtain, and read in the dim light on a sheet of paper which lay upon the desk: "Mrs. Dean telephones from the Ladies' Athenæum Club that she will come to dinner to-night." Mrs. Dean was my sister, a widow, ten years younger than myself.

I instantly murmured:

"Well, then, I'm damned if I don't ask Johnnie to come, too!"

And presently, with the disc at my ear, I was waiting, staring about me idly. Except for the ticking of the great clock the silence was complete. Above me and below me, to right and to left of me, groups of lives pulsated. The waves of the immense sea of London dashed against the walls of my fortress; but within the fortress, which was also a cloister, my egoism had established silence and calm.

And then there was a vibration of the disc.

"Is Captain Hulse at home? I'm Morrice Loring," I said to the lifeless metal before my mouth, just as if I had been speaking to a human being.

"Is that you, Morrice?" a small, resonant voice said in my left ear, after a long pause of clock ticking. It was the voice of Johnnie Hulse, travelling

to me over miles of roofs or under miles of pavements, circuitously but infallibly guided.

"I say, Johnnie, where are you dining to-night?" I answered.

"Nowhere. At the club. I don't know," said the faint, dehumanised, uncanny whisper in my ear.

"Well, you must come here, then."

"I don't think I'll come to-night, old man," my ear heard.

"Oh, that be hanged! You must."

"Why?" persisted the disc.

"Never mind why! You must come. Seven-thirty. Good-bye."

I dropped the apparatus into its attendant claw. And as the clock resumed its empire over my abode, I gazed absently at the senseless telephone, which at any instant might summon me to it again with its peremptory ring.

In the drawing-room, Ravel's "Miroirs" were already on the piano, placed there by silent, invisible hands! Home of miracles! I had only to wish, and the wish was fulfilled. If I wished my dinner, lo! it appeared in the dining room, various, copious, served with the complexity and the solemnity of a mass. I knew not how, by what machinery and processes. And in this retreat the matter of visual offence had, never been allowed to enter. Where my eye rested, there it rested on beautiful things—engravings, furniture, wall-papers, carpets. The view from the wide window consisted of nature's elm-trees, gigantic. Around me were bookcases behind whose glass the rich colouring of multitudinous books of four centuries mingled with reflections of objects in the room. Service, fine food, the instruments of æsthetic and intellectual pleasure, satisfied ambition, the consciousness of achievement, fame, health, knowledge, friends, freedom, silence, calm; neither money nor long endeavour could purchase more than I possessed of the means of happiness.

I sat down, curious to decipher the first of the "Miroirs." And the sound of the piano awoke the enchanted stillness of the drawing-room. But I could not read that music at sight. It was music that would yield to humble study but not to masterful intentions. There is music—and great music—in the execution of which the courage of the soul may in some sort atone for the stiffness of the fingers. But Ravel's music was not such. To yearn forth hints at it was worse than useless—disastrous. It

demanded wrists and hands as a *sine quâ non*. And actually I fancied for a moment that if I could have been a virtuoso on the piano, I should have been happy… !

Silence fell again. I went into my study, another large, austere, and beautiful chamber, with more books, shabbier than the books in the drawing-room, the earlier harvests of twenty years of collecting. On the table were the contents of the just-arrived parcel, placed there by invisible, silent hands: "The Golden Remains of the ever-memorable John Hales. Second edition, with additions, also letters and expresses concerning the Synod of Dort, not before printed. London, 1673." Folded within the cover was a bill of fifteen and sixpence for binding it in half-calf. A curious quarto! I had had it for years. I had not read it; I never should read it. Yet I loved it, and the thought that at last it was worthily bound afforded me distinct pleasure. I put the bill into a letter basket, and, as I negligently turned over the fragile yellow pages, I tried to decide in which bookcase and upon which shelf a place could be discovered for this treasure.

And as I pondered, there came from the next room the sound of a woman singing lightly a few bars of melody from Gluck's "Armida." I listened, startled, and scarcely aware why I was startled. The song ceased. I opened a door in the wall, and passed into the long and rather narrow bedroom whose windows, giving on an inner quadrangle, were of ground-glass, so that that room, more completely even than the others, seemed to be cut off from the world. Twin Hepplewhite mahogany beds, covered with purple, were the principal feature of it. Over a chair hung a white skirt frothed with lace. On one of a pair of Regency silver candlesticks which stood on a chest of drawers was perched rakishly a large yellow hat trailing feathery plumage. A man's head-gear on a candlestick, his pantaloons cast carelessly on a chair—these phenomena would fatally mar the effect of any interior; but that skirt and that hat achieved the final beauty of the bedroom, at the same time humanising it. And I, who could appreciate this, could yet not compass happiness! The woman stood with her back to me, opposite the toilet table, slim, straight, and tall. She was in underskirt and corset; the corset matched the underskirt. Her bare arms were raised above the pale shoulders, the elbows pointed sharply outwards, and the curved fingers met over a band of hair on the top of her head. In the toilet-mirror

I could see the image of a handsome, smiling, and slightly roguish face, the face of a woman of thirty-odd who has come to definite conclusions about life.

Chapter VII : Birth and Death of Love

I had met this lady for the first time—that is to say, I had effectively met her for the first time—ten years before in the Rue Montagne-de-la-Cour, Brussels. She was sitting in an open carriage behind a pair of horses and a coachman. It was a bright, cool, and windy day after Easter. The vehicle stood outside one of the numerous jewellers' shops in the narrow and steep street of luxuries. I on the busy pavement, and she leaning over with a certain quality of eagerness—we talked for a few moments about the concert at which we had been formally presented to each other a few weeks earlier. I told her that I had really been wanting to meet her again. And she said: "And do you suppose I haven't been wanting to meet *you* again?" She said with intense conviction in her eyes that my musical criticism was infinitely superior to any other in London or elsewhere, that it had always fascinated her, and that she had been wondering whether we ever should meet again so that she might hear me talk about music. I saw myself through the eyes of that young creature. Her eyes, her lips, her smile were all inviting me as she leaned over the side of the carriage. And her bearing was so candid, so ingenuous! She was fair, pretty, slim, elegant, intelligent, enthusiastic. We were in a foreign city. The encounter had romance in it, had in it something which transcended ordinary agreeable experience. In a pause she warned me that I was not to imagine that the carriage was hers. And she explained that she was in Brussels as the guest of a middle-aged couple whose daughter had been a fellow-student of hers at the Royal College of Music, and that her hosts, who treated her with incredible kindness and generosity, were at the moment in the jeweller's shop. It seemed that they had carried her off from London by mere force. Unfortunately they were not a bit interested in music; they were, however, nice, homely people, with plenty of money and a capacity for enjoying themselves. Whereupon I remarked that I assumed they could not, then, be specially excited about the Gluck Festival performances at the Brussels Opera, which I had been sent from London to criticise. She had only the vaguest idea of the Gluck performances, the modest

posters of the Théâtre de la Monnaie not having arrested her eyes. Besides, as she said, while with her friends she, had to cease to think about music. But as I talked, her interest in Gluck became feverish. "Wouldn't you like to hear 'Armida' to-night?" I asked her. And she answered with an affirmative that was passionate. "Well," I said, "will you come with me? I'm here for two papers and I shall have two seats." She said: "Not really?" Her eyes danced. I asked her if she thought her friends would be shocked if I invited her to dine with me before the performance. And she replied: "Of course not! They're American, you know. They'll only be too glad for me to enjoy myself." I said: "Then, will you?" And I stared hard at her. She faintly blushed. Then her friends came bustling and talkative out of the shop, bowed forth by a little shopman who responded to their broad American in Belgian English. I was introduced, and had the happy idea of mentioning my half-brother in Indianapolis. She had been right. They were quite delighted at the prospect of an evening's special enjoyment for their guest.

I spent an afternoon of wearing anticipation, nervous expectancy; one of those afternoons when the fingers of clocks and watches will not move. Partly to pass the time, and partly because the idea of work in the evening while she was with me was intolerable and even inconceivable, I prepared in advance as well as I could my telegram to my daily paper. I can say that I have known the torturing fever of a grand passion, and it was on that day that I was first seized.

We dined at the little Étoile, then as now the best restaurant in Europe. She was in black crêpe, décolletée; a large artificial rose in her hair. Vermilion lips; rather thin, but truly vermilion! Twitching nostrils! Humid, glinting eyes! On her bosom rose and fell a blazing diamond cross, a gift from those impulsive Americans; they had been buying it that morning; hence it was that they had suggested her remaining alone in the carriage. The foot of the cross was nearly hidden behind the top of her dress. The great line of Swinburne sprang into my mind. 'Ah, deep division of prodigious breasts!' She dropped her wrap behind her on the old-fashioned velvet seat, exposing her shoulders, bravely naked. And she straightened her shoulders with a proud gesture, as if saying: "I am the desire of the world." And at the same time her eyes were surrendering to me. They said: "See how I trust myself to you. Fragile, I am absolutely in your masculine power, and you are capable of being

brutal. I like my peril." She gave herself a delicious little shake as I poured out the wine. Filling of a glass—sacred and symbolic act, beautiful in itself, and how exciting! I can feel again the fine thinness of the crystal, the delicacy of the china, the heat of the restaurant, and the flattering, curious gaze of other diners continually on me and my conquest in the small room.

"What a chance!" I thought. "If I had happened to take a different street, this stupendous miracle, this splendid and terrifying enchantment, would never have been!" The conception of the hazards of life made me sick, with a kind of retrospective apprehension.

We could not loiter over the dinner. Nor did we wish to do so, for we were burnings for the opera, for the agitation of music. "It's a fine night," I said. "Shall we walk to the theatre? It's close by." In those days and for years afterwards, I had to count every shilling. "Oh, I should love to walk!" she exclaimed with eager assent. And she confided herself to me for the passage of the dim streets. I had the illusion of owning her; she walked close, close by me. And in the theatre she blossomed anew, and more magically. The audience was what is called 'brilliant,' and for Brussels it was extraordinarily brilliant. The Gluck Festival had the nature of a solemnity. It was patronised by the press of Europe, and by princes. The autocrat of Carlsruhe was conducting, and the operatic stars of Paris, Berlin, and Munich had consented, in homage to Gluck, to suffer the autocrat's tyranny for a week. In the confusion, Leopold, enthroned in the royal box, obviously took himself for an enlightened patron of the arts and the sole restorer of Gluck's glory. "I hadn't a notion it would be like this!" she murmured, glancing round about at the brilliance. Her vitality seemed to increase even more, and she gave that little thrill of the shoulders. What chiefly impressed me was the intensity of her appetite for pleasure. She bathed in it voluptuously. And the candour of her joy was childlike. I said to myself, "Why not?" All the evening we were close together. Her responsiveness, her receptiveness, her pliancy were astounding. On every artistic point she not only tried to agree with me; she not only persuaded herself that she agreed with me; she did actually and genuinely agree with me. She thought and felt through me, by me. She reflected me more quickly than a mirror. She drank me up. She became me. It was a tremendous, an overwhelming experience. And beneath the vivid music and the spectacle and the

clustering radiance of chandeliers, beneath the pungent brilliance of the crowd, beneath our excited talk of music and our careful manners to each other—my deference and her delicacy,—beneath all this froth rolled the deep rivers of our desire, silent but ruthless. Not art, not spirit, not intellect, but our bodies were the fundamental and grave fact. Not our mouths but our eyes, contradicting our mouths, said the true, paramount things. Her fine, courageous sensuality (conveyed who could explain how?) inspired me with an exultant respect for her and for that of which we always endeavour to be ashamed. It effected for me a transmutation of all values. My intellect stood still in awe, as before a terrific revelation.

During the last entr'acte I had to cross the square to the telegraph office. She asked appealingly if she might not go with me. Going to the telegraph office, to help to dispatch a press telegram, had for her the quality of an adventure. So we went together. And she stood exquisitely out of place, fragile, defenceless, and daring, with parted smiling lips, near the grille, while I performed a brief but astonishing feat of concentration in the high-roofed, echoing, dim-lit bureau. This memory of the night is as bright as any I have.

About midnight we were clattering in a closed fiacre up the hill to the Hotel Bellevue. We had little speech, but I asked her what she meant to do on the morrow, and she said that she really must go to the cathedral. The rendezvous was arranged at once, and quite simply. As the horse walked doggedly up the last bit of steep into the Place, I said to her with an assumption of negligence that I didn't even know what her Christian name was.

"My proper name is Iris," she said. "But I hate it. I always call myself Inez, and so do my friends."

Inez!

It was one of those felicities that women have sometimes.

After I had left her, with the correct ceremonies, in the portico of the hotel, I stood still, literally amazed, in the middle of the lofty avenue, where the electric cars were still gliding in clangour and light. I thought of how near she had been to me in the fiacre. "This is the most marvellous thing that ever happened," I muttered to myself, rapt, absorbed in an ecstatic conviction of the marvel. I wanted intensely to rush into the hotel and drag her out from its protection. But I had

irrevocably lost her till the morrow. I kept saying to myself: "Why! She's absolutely wonderful, and I could simply do what I like with her! I could simply do what I like with her!"

I passed a horrible night of longing for the future, of fear for the future. I neither slept nor tried to sleep. The next morning I saw her in the twilit and pompous immensity of the cathedral. She was more Inez than ever, and more mine than ever. No concealment in those eyes. In crossing the nave she bowed to the great altar. This startled me. I asked her with due gravity of tone if she was a Roman Catholic. She whispered: "No, but I often feel I should like to be. My friends here are." Her eyes were moist, and she looked at me with a gaze in which desire and devotion dignified each other. I was excruciatingly conscious of the charm of her mortal frame, of her yielding femininity, as we stood in the dark vista of the aisle.

Then six days of torture, six days of fevered idleness, succeeded before I could see her again. I saw her next in London, at her rooms in Clarendon Road, off Holland Park Avenue. It was night. Her little drawing-room was agreeably arranged as a frame for her. Its chief article of furniture was a grand piano. She gave lessons in the piano. She read for me music which I had brought, and showed a highly unusual facility. And her intelligence was extraordinarily alert and receptive. It was admitted and agreed between us then that we were indispensable to each other. Words were exchanged, but they were few and unnecessary. The fact that we were indispensable to each other was too glaringly patent to need articulate statement. I kissed her. I held her. We were solitary and secure in the tiny flat, under the shaded lamp, and she the image of modest acquiescence. And my unconquerable conventional pride surged up and took control of me. "No!" it said. "You aren't going to have any complications in your life; you aren't going to be at the mercy of accidents; you aren't going to do anything silly." I left her immaculate. The next morning I was at the office of the registrar of marriages. "She is everything that one could want in a woman!" I reflected, dazed by the very stroke of my luck. But if she had had nothing desirable but that which the eye can see, I should still have been at the office of the registrar of marriages. Her gifts made no real difference. She had to be mine, at any price. I suggested that the marriage should be kept strictly secret till June, and that in June our

friends should be allowed to suppose that it had but just occurred, so that we might be spared the tedium of friendly remarks upon our precipitancy, and so that our characters for prudence might remain intact. She was delighted with the scheme. After three weeks, of which I counted every interminable hour, we duly figured before the registrar. And she was mine, surreptitiously, furtively, with exciting, exquisite accompaniments of stealth and chicane; but lawfully. And I drew a long breath and expected to be happy.

Yes, it was a grand passion on both sides, and for sometime it enthralled us. The girl in Inez became the woman under my eyes. She had indeed the physical courage of her love; and nothing in my life has ever more enchantingly impressed me than the timid, silent spontaneities by which in the first days she expressed this courage. I was not happy, I was merely absorbed. There were two obstacles to my happiness. One was that my work was summoning me. I do not mean the journalism by which I gained a livelihood, but the major enterprise by which I intended to live. The summons was insistent. The other was that I could not, from lack of means, put Inez into the rich frame which her instincts and individuality demanded. We set up housekeeping with my furniture and hers, and hope. From the circumstances in which I had first met her, and from the atmosphere of luxury which she seemed to emanate, I had thought that she must have some regular resources. But it was not so. Her existence could only have been a series of shifts, fortunate escapes, and feats of equipoise. Often she must have sustained life and brilliant appearances on a few shillings: she depended on the fees of pupils. Upon the disclosure of our marriage two vague negligible brothers showed themselves momentarily and vanished; that was all. The financial structure of her daily life seemed to crumble into dust at a man's touch. I had no grievance whatever, but such things are curious enough to mention. I could support my wife. Support, however, was not adequate to the situation. The perception of my concealed unhappiness induced unhappiness in her, which she also concealed, ineffectually. What she felt keenliest was the constant tugging of my work against the cords that held me to her. She could see the cords stretching. The grand passion continued, still omnipotent, an ever-renewed source of Lethean rapture, an eternal refuge of bliss from the world's dailiness and from

conscience and right judgement. It seemed as if nothing could impair its sovereign spell. Yet each day it aged, if imperceptibly.

Inez abandoned the effort to conserve a clientèle of pupils, and determined to practice with a view to public appearance as a pianist. I knew the scheme was hopeless; more than extreme facility and a receptive temperament is needful in these days to success in solo execution. She too, somewhere within herself, knew that it was hopeless. The violence of her appetite for pleasure drove her to a desperate course that could only end in disillusion. But I had to pretend to admire the architecture of her castle in the air. I took advantage of her new habit of industry to resume seriously my own work, and I never again loosed it. Suddenly the practising ceased. No explanation, no comment; it ceased! Then Inez became a Roman Catholic: which is equivalent to saying that she became an ardent Roman Catholic. My attitude in this picturesque affair was one of benevolently-amused neutrality. One Sunday evening I walked into Brompton Oratory with her. In the theatrically-contrived gloom of the great interior, dim figures knelt before the altars. I was taken aback by the violence with which she threw herself down in front of a row of candles, and, hands feverishly clasped, poured out an invocation. I was taken aback, and I was put out of countenance. We emerged in silence. Yet the physical courage of her passion showed no change. The religiosity was only another instinctive effort to gratify inexpensively her appetite for spectacular pleasure—the appetite which I could not gratify. I despised her now. I did not hide from myself that on several counts I despised her. For her receptiveness, her lack of original force, her imitativeness! For her fierce love of pleasure! For her frank worship of popular success! This love and this worship were implicit in her conversation. (She did not give hints; she was more subtle than that.) Whereas my conversation implied that the love of spectacular pleasure was barbaric, and that popular success could have none but a disquieting significance for the philosopher, and that effort and self-approval were the sole basis of genuine content. I used always to say that good work was good, and could not be improved by acclamations. She would agree that my work was good, and my ambition heroic. She would agree to everything. But when she heard or read of resplendent success, and of glittering existences made possible by the wealth that success had

gained,—then with a single gesture, a single intonation, she would divulge her heart's secret.

And I despised her the more because her instincts were in accord with my own, which warred against my reason. I, too, wanted success! I, too, wanted the appreciation of the mob! I, too, wanted spectacular pleasure! But I would not admit it. I was too proud to admit that my desires outran my possessions. It was her frank admissions that irritated me. She, with her beauty and her imperishable gracefulness, was the voice of my under-self. We were straitened; but we had food, clothes, books, a roof; some friends, and ample means of private æsthetic enjoyment. We did not look poor. The rigour of my blue suits and black neckties never fell short of masculine elegance. Her simple clothes always achieved distinction. Appearances were preserved. Our dignity was kept. Was not this enough? "No! No! and No!" her desires seemed soundlessly to shriek.

One evening, when I was engaged in Fleet Street, she went into the gallery at Covent Garden after standing three hours in the queue for the chance of a seat. And she reached home a few minutes after me, draggled, wet. I was angry. My vanity was affronted. I nearly lost my temper—a mishap that I had avoided ever since an explosion at the age of eighteen had made me ill for a week. I saved myself by sarcasm. *My* wife waiting at gallery doors for hours with the half crown mob! *My* wife trailing in and out of omnibuses in midnight rain! Had she no more self-respect, no more regard for the external form of life? And all the time it was myself I was upbraiding. She was angry, viciously angry. "When you can afford to offer me a stall and a hansom you may begin to talk—and I'll thank you not to begin before!" she said, and added something in the nature of an anti-climax to the effect that she did *not* thank me for an occasional press-ticket that nobody else wanted. And she retired to bed. The scene was a profound humiliation, for both of us. The effect of it seemed to pass, of course. But in six months after that the grand passion was dead. Of the immense and fierce conflagration nothing remained but the black damage. The scene had not been a cause of the passion's death—merely a symptom that it was dying. Five years the grand passion had lived. A great age! Three is the normal limit. We existed together, indifferent: which, on reflection, seemed as miraculous as our mutual attraction once had been. Existence would have degenerated into

an unseemly altercation had not my intense regard for my dignity and hers continually animated me to the effort of tact and restraint necessary to keep it at a higher level. The ever-renewed effort was fatiguing me into despair when two events—first the reception given to my book and then the inheritance of my half-brother's riches—conspired to rescue us. A sheer hazard! But we were saved.

Inez bore the blow very well; and it is not everybody who can survive with credit the shock of great good fortune. Some shine in adversity, some in prosperity; Inez belonged to the latter class. Although I secretly condescended to her again because she found her happiness so easily amidst mere symbols without worth, still I admired her for her deportment. She was neither maladroit nor consequential; nor was she extravagant. With the calm mastery of a duck to water she took to the income which was now at her disposal, and to the situation of being the wife of a man who had won renown among the disdainers of the multitude. Also, we were both diverted by the amusing process of changing our environment. Her taste in the creation of an interior was quite as fastidious as my own, and in some respects more sure.

Another detail. Less than a year ago, despite an uncommonly powerful physique and constitution. I had been overthrown by a serious attack of rheumatic fever. Her direction of my nursing was admirable, and irreproachable her demeanour to myself, especially during my petulant convalescence when I defied doctors and devils to keep me in bed. Throughout that illness the daily vision of her grace—albeit a grace which never melted into impulsive tenderness—had alleviated my affliction.

Chapter VIII : On Inez

Inez turned round from the glass and faced me, dropping her long, bare arms.

"Well," she said abruptly, "what do you think of it?"

And she stood quite still, as if under inspection.

"Think of what?" I asked.

"My new coiffure," she answered.

Her eyes gleamed; her body seemed to quiver with abundant life.

"Let me see now," I said, and sat down, conscious suddenly of fatigue, on the soft, yielding bed. I put my hands into my pockets and stretched

out my legs, and gazed at that splendid hair. "Saucy!" I murmured judicially, and repeated, with approval, "Decidedly saucy!"

"I should say so!" she remarked, content. Beneath the demureness, the sobriety, the self-watchfulness of the woman who cuts an important figure in the world, there peeped out for an instant the malapert, the delicious impudence of the universal feminine satisfied with itself. Not a wink; less than a wink; a quiver across the eyelids!

In her short skirt she tripped primly to a wardrobe, and opened it and drew forth a tea-gown in two shades of pale green. She held it up thoughtfully.

"I shall wear this tonight," she said. "Mary won't mind. You've seen her telephone message?"

"Yes," I said. "And I've telephoned to Johnnie to come and dine, too."

"Captain Hulse! Why?"

Her voice was never more beautiful than when, startled, she raised it slightly.

"No particular reason," I said. "I just thought we might as well give that affair every chance."

She lifted her chin.

"And did he say he would come?"

"Of course," I answered.

She stood hesitant, with the imponderable robe in her right hand, staring at it absently.

"Oh! Well, he won't mind either!" she said, coming to a decision; and she slipped on the robe, and shook it downward toward her feet with a curious motion of the whole frame.

"There's no 'of course' about it," she continued, closing the wardrobe and examining herself in its glazed doors. "They had lunch together to-day."

"Who did?"

"Mary and Captain Hulse."

The devil they did!" I exclaimed, charmed and astonished. "Who told you?"

"Captain Hulse told me."

"You've seen him this afternoon? Where?"

"I met him in Dover Street," she replied quietly, twisting her neck so as to glimpse, from under downcast lids, the back of the robe in the glass. "It seems Mary came up to town this morning for the day."

"Arranged beforehand, then?"

"What?"

"The lunch"

"*I* don't know," said Inez, with an inflection playfully malicious; as if she had said: "Don't ask *me* what goes on between your correct sister and Captain Hulse!"

"Anyhow," I said, "he'll meet her at two meals in the same day, instead of one; that's all. It'll be a surprise for him—and for her."

"You didn't tell him she was coming, then?"

"Not exactly." I laughed.

"Morrice!" said the singular, the ever-enigmatic Inez. "What's the matter with you to-day?" She said it kindly, half-maternally.

I grinned, and mischievously curled my lips. Assuredly neither she nor any one could have guessed that I was incurably unhappy and desolate, and that all this amused and naughty interfering interest which I displayed in a matter that did not concern me was no more an expression of my soul than foam is an expression of the mystery of the sea's dark bed. How deep life lies!

"I heard a fine thing this afternoon," I said, and told her about the concert and Ravel's "Miroirs."

"So that's it, is it?" she remarked. "You're always like that when you've heard something good."

"Like what?"

"Larkish," she said after a pause.

"Oh, indeed!" I rejoined grimly. But whether she was stating a profound truth generalised from a long series of careful observations, or whether she was saying merely the first thing that came into her head, I knew not. One never does know, in these cases.

"Was that Ravel that you were trying to play just now?" she inquired.

"Yes."

"My poor boy!" She raised her eyebrows, as if it were in compassion at my horrible failure.

"Simply unplayable at sight!" I excused myself.

"My poor boy!" she said again.

"Well," I said, "you try yourself, and you'll see."

"Oh!" she lightly exclaimed. "I don't pretend to play, now."

"You shall wrestle with Ravel tonight, at any rate," I said. "We'll watch your struggles, Mrs. Conceit."

Instead of replying she looked at me fixedly.

"And what have you been doing since the concert?" she asked.

"Nothing," I said. "I strolled feebly home, through the Park."

"Where did you have tea?"

"Haven't had any," I admitted. "Never once thought of it! Anyway, it's too late now."

"Morrice!" she protested. "And look how hot it is! You know how you are when you get too thirsty. You'll eat nothing. Do you mean to say you aren't thirsty?"

"I won't swear I'm not."

She tapped her gilded foot. You must have something to drink." Then she rang the bell. The spectacled girt responded.

"Marion," she said coldly, "mix a lemon squash and put it in the study —at once."

"Yes'm."

"And, Marion!" She held the girl as by an invisible chain while she turned to me: "Have you told them that Captain Hulse is coming to dinner?"

"No," I said guiltily.

"But, my poor boy, how do you expect them to know?" Then to Marion: "Captain Hulse is coming to dinner, as well as Mrs. Dean."

"Thank you, m'm."

The door was silently shut.

Very soon we heard discreet noises in the adjoining study.

"Now go and have your lemon squash," said Inez gravely. "And whatever you do, don't drink too quickly."

As I sat obediently drinking, surrounded by my books, I could hear her quick, smooth movements in the bedroom,—the rustle of stuffs, a few footsteps, a murmured exclamation, the tinkle of jewellery. I felt dimly that I had enjoyed that conversation. Mysterious Inez! She was young yet. She exulted in the force of her vitality and in the power of her charm. She was happy. She had within her a secret and inexhaustible sense of happiness. She was without ambition. Her ambition had been

fulfilled and was dead. She knew no divine discontent. She lived from hour to hour, in and for the hour. She did not live in the future. Each hour was an end in itself. She never yearned for the other side of the hill, beyond the sunset. She culled the flowers in her path. And in my unfathomable desolation, which surged over me again as I dreamed alone in my lair, I asked myself: "But is not this the true art of life that she practices? Have I not always been preparing to live, and never living? I may have found knowledge, but it is she who has found wisdom. She is wise enough to live. I am not."

She had no eyesight for the inconvenient unpleasant imperfections that mar the earth. She saw what she wished to see, and no more. And I asked myself: "But is not this also the true art of life? And if she goes to one extreme, do I not go to the other? After all, one must select one's facts. One cannot see everything. One cannot take the whole world on one's shoulders."

A door clicked gently. She had left the bedroom, quietly, elegantly, with those movements of hers that never jarred....

Shallow? Birdlike? Yes, perhaps! But how mysterious! And how graceful! The infallible firm grace of her gestures could not but be the expression of something distinguished in her soul. This thought intensified my sadness almost intolerably: that once the sight of her could throw me into a fever, and that now I could behold her unmoved. Gone, that spell!... Was I not unjust to her in crediting her with happiness? Something was irrevocably dead in her too. Could it be naught to her that now I beheld her unmoved, and she me? I felt as sorry for her as for myself. I went back through the sad, exquisite, violent hours of our long passion. We were close linked, indeed, by the past, by all those days and all those nights. We had lived, together. And now we inhabited the same flat, satisfying our tepid desires with the sane and perfunctory nonchalance of animals. Could she be really happy? Or was her demeanour only a splendid proud pretence?

The piano sounded. She was in the drawing-room, and attacking the "Night Moths" of Ravel, at sight. It was a brilliant, audacious effort; a supreme effort to show me of what she was capable when she tried. I thought: "By God! she may be shallow, but she's infernally clever! How many women, or men, are there in London who could do that?"

In that moment I was conscious, or deemed that I was conscious, of the first flicker of a new longing for her. Through her I seemed to perceive an escape from my desolation; a cure for my malady, or at least a relief, from it. I saw hope. I thought: "Surely one can rebuild, knowingly! Artificial…! But who shall say what is artificial and what real? I must teach myself to forget the future in the present, and the world in her." … And I saw her as an incomparable instrument and aid to philosophic living, an instrument that had lain idle. "Oh, yes!" I said to myself—I nearly said it aloud, "I must try this, seriously. I must learn to live." I was quite excited, and in my excitement I had the illusion of forgetting my desolation.

Chapter IX : The Dinner

I was late for dinner. Inez raised her finger at me, good-humoredly reproachful. Hulse was on the hearthrug, talking as usual. My sister Mary, at ease on a sofa, was listening to him, intently, with a faint malicious smile. Few disturbing phenomena could interrupt Hulse when his lips had been fairly unsealed; and certainly the arrival in the drawing-room of a host was not among them. He shook my hand absently but powerfully, without a pause in his speech. Mary and I kissed with the nonchalance of brother and sister.

"I was pretty late," she whispered, under the loud cadences of Hulse. "But I'm not so bad as you."

"Come along," said Inez.

We went into the dining-room, and sat down, and Marion, the spectacled girl, who was petrified in a corner like a statue of some realistic decadence, received the magic gift of life, and began the religious service of the dinner; and Hulse still eloquently flowed on, in what I perceived to be a description of a collision between suffragettes and policemen which he had himself witnessed at St. Stephen's late that afternoon.

"Their faces were, covered with sweat," he said. "Their whole bodies must have been in a sweat."

Another man would have said 'perspiration,' especially in presence of a woman like Mary; but not the unsparing Johnnie Hulse. All his existence seemed to be a challenge to the world. He was one of those whose chief characteristic is that they don't care what happens next, one

of those who are rich enough to pay any price for candour. He went about saying the things he thought, in his loud, rich, orator's voice. I had met him a couple of years before at the Savile Club, from which he had subsequently withdrawn, saying savagely that its manners were too demure, and that it was the last and worst stronghold of British hypocrisy. He never tired of teasing me, who remained a faithful member, by calling it the Mincing Club. He was the most violent and the most persuasive man that I have perhaps ever known. By profession, he painted in oils. He was a pillar of the New English Art Club. His pictures were small and rare and tremendously defiant. A few were magnificent. I had one that was a masterpiece, "I think that will give you pleasure," he said to me when I bought it from him. It did. Whenever Johnnie Hulse outraged me I used to look at that picture and say to myself, nodding my head: "But he can paint—I'm damned if he can't!" I was one of the few that did buy a picture from him occasionally. The press and the public honestly thought his work too obstreperously absurd for even a moment's consideration. "The worst eccentricities of the French school of Independents," said one organ. "It would be revolting were it not comic," said another. And another said not a word, doubtless hoping the more effectually to snub the fellow by this august and complete silence. Of course he had lived too long in Paris. He spoke French too well. These things put England against him. And he was always against England. "It's an impossible country for an artist," he would roll out. "Im-poss-i-ble!… And I'm always coming back to it."

He had no private means, and he would remark that in a good year he made enough out of painting to pay for his rose madder. Yet he continually spent large sums of money. He was a bachelor, with the most expensive of all hobbies: women. Now, at the age of forty, possibly the ardour of that hobby had somewhat cooled. In the matter of women, his taste was as wide as humanity; it included the very worst and the very best. In all other matters he would have naught but the best. He could never tolerate the second rate in cigarettes, clothes, literature, trains—what not! A highly experienced frequenter of all the fashionable restaurants in London and Paris, he was treated as an equal by chefs; and maîtres d'hôtel and waiters simply fawned around him like dogs; but then he had only one way of talking, whether to a prime minister or a waiter; and he never examined a bill, and he gave enormous tips. He

was the artist royal. Strange and sinister tales ran about as to the origin of his income. But the origin of his income was quite simple. It came from his connoisseurship in the old masters, in the painters of the Romantic school, and in Japanese painting. He was acknowledged, among the initiate, to be one of the supreme European experts. And he stooped to dealing; he was a power behind the thrones of the great dealers. "I must have money," he would say. "And I can get it, so." When he had planted, at an exaggerated price, a bad genuine example of an old master upon a wholesale draper in search of correctness, his private joy was infantile. Another victory over the hypocritical bourgeois—curse 'em! He had had lean years, and narrow escapes, but he had also had fat years. In one resplendent year he had bought a Titian from an ignorant fool in Liège for a thousand francs, and sold it at Christie's for nineteen thousand pounds. "Not honest, of course!" he would admit. "I ought to have told the ass what he was selling to me. But it's within the commercial code. This isn't heaven—it's the earth." It was in that year that London heard of Captain Hulse's private orchestra —a fleeting regal caprice.

The title 'captain' suited him, with his tremendous voice and often aggressive demeanour, and his broad, square shoulders; though his stature was somewhat below the normal of his class. It was a vestige of some youthful strutting in the militia. He despised the military temperament with a cruel incandescent scorn, but he kept to the title, calculating in hundreds of pounds its annual value to him on this human, bourgeois earth.

"They were not cats," Captain Hulse proceeded with his description to my sister of what he had seen, while my wife and I watched. "No! worse than cats. Cats don't sweat, and even when they scratch they are graceful, they never lose their dignity. They were scowling and gasping and pulling faces, their hats all awry, and most absurdly trying to stick their feet into the ground so firm that the policemen couldn't push them on. And there were those great, tall, fat, overfed brutes of policemen, with leather round their waists to keep their gross flesh from sprawling, shoving them along all the time, fumbling, without using their hands, and looking right over the girls' heads, like hippopotamuses on their hind legs."

Never did Johnnie Hulse refer to London policemen save in terms of disgust. It was their height that he could not tolerate. He was secretly very sensitive about his own stature; nor did the thought of Napoleon soothe him. Once when we were standing side by side alone together at a bookcase in my study, he had said suddenly, in a savage tone, looking up at me: "Gad, Loring, I could murder you!" "Why?" "Because you're eight inches taller than I am." "You could make hay of me," I laughed, and he said: "I know I could."

He went on, to Mary:

"And the crowd, the miserable crowd of shabby clerks and fly-swallowers, yah-ing and yow-ing and yaw-ing—cads, worse than a Roman mob at a circus, and that's saying something! It was obscene, nothing else but obscene! It took humanity back to the stone and the wood age. And it was the girls who were the cause. I call it an offence against decency."

Mary, excited and controlling her excitement, nervously looked down at her soup plate. She was wearing a large black-and-white hat. Why she should have retained her hat during dinner I could not imagine, unless for a sign that the visit was informal and that she was a mere pilgrim. But the retention of the hat was characteristic of Mary.

"And yet you say you are in favour of our campaign," she murmured, and sipped at her spoon primly. Mary was influential in the organising councils of the suffragist cause. I guessed that she had come to London that day for a committee-meeting. She did not, however, form part of the policemen-assaulting battalions.

"I was! I was!" Johnnie thundered. "But I don't know if I am now. I hadn't seen the campaign in action before. I only saw it to-day by sheer accident; and I don't want to see it again. I couldn't stand it. It's obscene, it's bestial."

"All you need is a course of training," my sister rejoined in her careful voice. "If you can't stand the sight of women 'sweating' in the street"—she emphasised ever so slightly his Anglo-Saxon word—"you ought to go and see them 'sweating' in laundries in Shepherd's Bush, and 'sweating' in dressmakers' workrooms in Sloane Street, and 'sweating' in mills in Lancashire, and 'sweating' behind bars all over England. And if that doesn't harden you, you'll have to tell them personally that they're obscene and ungraceful, and that their proper sphere is the home."

He stared at her with his glittering eyes, but she kept hers bent on the table.

"People won't stand those street scenes, you'll find," he muttered.

"Exactly!" said my sister with false calm. "And that's how we shall win! Not by convincing you, but by shocking you. The British public will never be convinced by argument. But two drops of perspiration on the cheeks of a nice-looking girl with a torn skirt and a crushed hat will make it tremble for the safety of its ideals, and twenty drops will persuade it to sign anything for the restoration of decency. You surely don't suppose that *argument* will be of any use!" she finished acidly.

"How true that is!" he yielded, with a rich and generous smile that instantly dispelled all the serious hardness of his face. "How true that is!" And he was off instantly on his favourite horse, charging against the cowardly hypocrisy of the British public.

Mary had won in the encounter. And few women, or men either, would have faced the torrent of Johnnie's invective. Inez, for example, never seriously disagreed with him, never came to grips. She would retreat —behind a fan, or she would abjectly concur in his thesis. But Mary, the stickler for decorum, the outwardly timid and gauche, the prim, the demure, the tremendously English—Mary was a fighter. And she had a gift of sarcasm that was a very dangerous weapon.

The widow of a rich stockbroker, she lived at Harrow with her little daughter, aged seven. Superficially she was the most English Englishwoman that you could see in a box at a theatre. A neutral! But the heat of the suffragist movement had somehow broken the obstinate frost of her nature, and her individuality had emerged, was still emerging.

Difficult to conceive two individualities more dissimilar than hers and Johnnie's! And yet at their first encounter, six months ago, she had been very visibly impressed by him, and he had surprisingly confided to me his admiration of her character and intellect. She did not conceal that she liked him. She could not. Even in arguing with him, even in pouring out satire on him, she could not. She vibrated with a new and strange vitality when he was present. These phenomena titillated me; I found them poignant. The matchmaker that is in everybody was roused in me. Naturally, no one could foretell the consequences of a union between two such opposing creatures. But then no one could foretell the consequences of any union whatsoever! The prospect was

not without danger. But what prospect is? He was, or had been, in plain word, a libertine. Well, she knew. Everyone knew. I could fancy even that fact did not disserve him in my sister's eyes. He was mentally honester than any stockbroker. And she had enough money for both. It would be positively exciting to see them married, to see Johnnie Hulse as a stepfather, and the prim Mary intimately foregathering with the violent amateur of varied experiences. They were foregathering already. The lunch, tête-à-tête: at whose suggestion, I wondered, had that occurred? And what had they discussed? It pleased me to consider Mary in a new rôle. Deeper than all these feelings was the desire, possibly quite altruistic, to complete these two fine individualities by joining them. I liked and I respected them both. Johnnie Hulse, as a distinguished painter, a fastidious critic, an honest and powerful intelligence, a man of immense moral courage and an original artist in life! As for my sister, I have never respected a woman more than I did her. And of her irony, and her harsh, brusque common-sense, I was almost naively proud.

"Marion," I said suddenly, "bring some champagne."

A childish idea on my part. But tradition has made this meretricious draught the classic symbol of joyous fellowship and spiritual outpouring.

"I shan't drink your champagne, you know," Johnnie laughed shortly, half sneering, while Marion was speaking in her unmoved anæmia into the tube to the kitchen. He never would touch champagne.

"The others will," said I. "And I shall."

And we did, Mary of course demurely, timidly.

She and Johnnie nearly monopolised the conversation. It was their hour. I looked across at Inez. Though she was silent, her eye, too, glanced fires. A mysterious life seemed to be stirring darkly within her. She, too, must have been quickened by the quickening of passion in Mary and in John Hulse. Far, far, within my soul, the real Me existed still desolate, but resolutely saying to itself: "You must learn to live. Perhaps the whole secret of your despair lies in the fact that, having once loved ardently, you had ceased to love. Perhaps it is nothing more recondite than that. Perhaps…"

Chapter X : The Departure

Inez sat at the piano, reading the "Mournful Birds" of Ravel. I stood fingering a book in a corner of the drawing-room, watching her. Mary and Johnnie Hulse were together on a settee, watching her. The room was brightest over her head. The lines of her gown, of her arms, and of her intent profile were beautiful. Her hands and the gestures of her hands were beautiful. Strange that that woman could not move without creating beauty! The whole of her life was an evolution of one grace out of another. She was at her best when she knew that she was observed. She became then a conscious artist, intensifying by applied skill her appeal to the eye. Hulse felt it. Mary also must have felt it. Mary was pleasant to look upon, particularly her talking eyes and the subtle critical malice of her lips when they curved downwards. But she did not enrapture the sight, and she was not complete. Her movements were somewhat ungainly; her dress was no part of herself. Inez had a magic power over her dress so that it was always expressive of her. When Inez put on a dress it became alive, endowed with her life, and even a little fold of silk down near her foot would illustrate the elegance of her intention; she could kick the last flounce of it into harmony. Mary's clothes, expensive, stylish, might have been anybody's. Mary's clothes surrounded her and trailed after her by force of hooks; they passed a dismal existence deprived of love. Mary scorned clothes; at least she scorned her own. Her good clothes were her concession to conventionality. Mary, having intellect and the effective weapon of humour, relied on these. She did not begin to live socially till her body was at rest and her acute self-consciousness reassured. Then her individuality would be radioactive. Whereas the individuality of Inez spent itself mildly without ceasing in a persuasive appeal to the sight. But it must not be invited to assertion in other ways. Instinctively it avoided such other ways. Inez seldom or never said anything original, or even witty, or memorable. She shirked argument, and if compelled to argue, she lost her grace. What intellect she had she would not display.

And yet the co-ordination of eye and brain and hands necessary to the smooth reading of the music as she read it,—surely, that involved not merely intellectual power, but intellectual power highly disciplined! And it involved a receptiveness, a responsiveness, and a controlled emotional facility that were astonishing. Impossible to dismiss Inez as an

inventor of attitudes and a flatterer of the eye! In an encounter, in a collision, Mary could have vanquished her and rendered her ridiculous to the understanding, so far as she might have differed from Mary. But Mary never could have accomplished what Inez was accomplishing, nor anything else on the same level of skilled effectiveness. Mary could never shine with that radiance. Whatever Mary's mission was she could not carry it to the same point of perfection as Inez carried her mission of affording æsthetic delight. Inez, who lived for pleasure, was a marvellous instrument of pleasure. And in such a feat as the feat of that evening she was at her best.

She had impregnated the room with the delicious sadness of those mournful birds. Having finished she turned half round on the music-stool, her right hand on its rim, and her face, in shadow, leaning forward.

"Well?" she asked, looking at Johnnie.

"Well," said Johnnie. "He'd got a nerve, no mistake!"

"Who?"

"The man that brought that to London and played it to an English audience! Tcha!" He chuckled almost silently. "Tcha!"

The thought of the dull, heavy hostility of the English audience gave him an intense, sinister joy. He revelled in the stupidity of his fellow-countrymen.

"Do you like it?" asked Inez.

"I'm interested in it," he replied, hesitating.

"He's only just landed in New York," said Mary. "You mustn't ask him yet what he thinks of the country."

"New *York!"* Inez murmured carelessly. "My dear, what are you talking about? Morrice, I wish you'd get me my cigarettes."

"Will you play another?" Johnnie suggested, leaning back.

"Play 'A Bark on the Ocean,' I said, as I looked here and there for her cigarette case.

"Oh, yes!" she protested. "You choose the most difficult, naturally!"

I drew aside the curtains and slightly opened the double doors to go into the dining-room. There, one table-lamp burned on the sideboard, and under it was Inez's cigarette case. In the shadow, at the far end of the silent room, a figure was bending over the dumb-waiter. It was Marion, fulfilling the last rites. I could distinguish the black of her dress, the white braces of her apron, and the white blossom in her hair. She

jumped up on hearing me, and her spectacles glinted darkly on her pale, flabby face.

"Can I get you anything, sir?" she inquired with respectful eagerness.

"No, thanks," I said. "I only wanted these cigarettes."

She turned calmly away. I could have gone up to her and stood over and demanded of her: "And what do *you* think of life, mysterious Marion?" But of course I did not. Was it a heart that beat within that flat bosom, or was it only a clock? It would seem that I could not, by shutting my outer door on the hanging gallery, shut out enigmas from my abode! I returned with the cigarette case to the glitter of the drawing-room and drew the curtains on Marion kneeling at the extremity of the dark dining-room.

Inez was staring at the music. Evidently she meant to play again. Suddenly Mary sprang up and went to the piano.

"Shall I turn over for you, Inez?"

"Oh, do, dear!"

Mary drew a chair up to the piano, and sat down, frowning as she examined the pages. And Inez began to play "A Bark on the Ocean," having first exchanged a smile with Mary. Those two women had nothing in common. They had little sympathy with each other. It would have been difficult to believe that Mary did not intellectually condescend toward Inez, and certainly Inez some times resented the razor which was Mary's tongue. Yet they sat side by side as though endeared by the closest ties of love and mutual comprehension. It seemed as if Mary had suddenly felt compelled to flee from the male on the settee, and that now they two had formed a party for self-protection against the two males in the room. Somehow, Mary, in that moment, appeared to me more a woman than I had ever seen her, and less a mere intellectual sister. They made a picture. They made a symbol. I thought: "Ah, why cannot all fine women be merged into one for the companionship of a man? Why cannot a man demand everything from a woman and have it? Then the meaning of life might be clearer."

Johnnie was also affected by the grouping of the women. He took from the pocket of his dinner-jacket the sketch-book which he often carried, and started to jab marks on it with a green-cased lithographic pencil, scowling. I knew that he would be producing something vehement and surprising. He would be capable of centralising the

interest on Mary's hat, and of attempting to express the whole significance of the composition in the curves of the hat.

Inez played courageously, surging through the incredible arpeggios as the bark surged through the ocean. And all Mary's intellect was concentrated to the effort of turning the page at the right critical instant. The room was full of heaving sound.

Suddenly Inez threw up her hands and the music ceased.

"Oh! It's absurd!" she exclaimed crossly. "I can't do it! No one could! It wants three months' practice."

"I thought you were doing wonderfully." Mary soothed her. And then Mary, turning to Johnnie Hulse for confirmation of her statement that Inez was doing wonderfully, perceived what Johnnie was doing. Her face changed in a singular manner. There was a pause, and she said, glancing at the clock:

"Oh, I must really go. I must catch the 9.40 tonight."

Everybody was amazed.

"But you never go earlier than the 10.40!" said Inez.

This was true.

"I must, truly, dear! I'll just get my things, if I may."

Mary went quickly out of the room, nervous, excited, not herself. A trifle had struck me. She had called Inez 'dear.' Now Mary never addressed another woman in that term, which she reserved for her daughter. She hated any sort of effusiveness, particularly between women; this to the point of an exterior harshness. Yet she had called Inez 'dear.' Proof sufficient of her discomposure! She seemed to be growing more feminine to me every minute.

A caprice, of course! The discovery that Johnnie was making a drawing of her behind her back had startled the fawn that crouched beneath that intellect of hers; had made her too conscious of herself and of him. And the fawn had fled, capriciously, unreflectingly, into the brake.

Inez lit a cigarette, and then said:

"I must just go and look after her."

And Johnnie and I were left alone. We said not a word to each other. We were not quite at ease. It was not to be expected that we should be. The effect of his individuality on Mary's was too patent. Mary was my sister: I felt in a way guilty of any antics she might commit. Moreover,

great developments, the mingling of destinies, might be imminent. There was that in the air which could not be hinted at, even between cronies. So we sat silent. Johnnie closed the sketch-book and slipped it back into his pocket.

After interminable minute I rang the bell.

"I'd better take measures for a taxi," I muttered.

"Yes," he agreed. "I shall see her as far as the station."

"Oh!" said I. "You're going, too?"

"Yes."

There was no reply to the bell. I rang again. Still no reply. Then I went out impatiently into the hall, which blazed with light. "Where is that spectacled girl?" I thought. The dining-room door was ajar, and darkness within; she could not be there. I adventured into the kitchen, which was lit but empty. Curious, perplexing, unintelligible spot, the kitchen! So abruptly different from the rest of civilisation. On the white deal table an open book lay with the pages downward. And across the green cover I read the gold title, "Wormwood." I hesitated. Then the door of the service stairs opened and Marion appeared. She was nearly breathless, and the sight of me robbed her of what breath she had.

"Oh, sir,'! she gasped. You give me such a start!"

It was the first time that I had ever glimpsed the human being in her.

"I want you to get a taxi or whistle down for one, Marion," I said.

"I've just been, sir," she, answered. "Mistress told me to. It's waiting."

I regained the hail. I could now hear Johnnie Hulse's stammering fingers on the piano.

"Great Scott!" I thought. "Are those confounded women going to chatter in the bedroom forever!" I looked at my watch. It meant nothing to me whether Mary caught the 9.40 or the 10.40. But as a matter of principle I objected to the missing of trains and to the careless unfulfillment of programmes. The negligent forgetting of the flight of time annoyed me. "What on earth can they be talking about?"

Without reflection I passed into my study. This room lay between the bedroom and the drawing-room. It communicated with the bedroom by a small masked door, and with the drawing-room by a large door. My directing thought must have been that I might hear them chattering through the thin masked door. But the masked door was open several inches and there was no sound of talking; I could, however, catch

a woman's movements. I waited. The piano had stopped. The door leading to the drawing-room was nearly but not quite closed. I approached it hesitatingly. As I did so I faintly heard Johnnie's voice:

"He's gone to look after the taxi."

One or other of the women had, then, gone from the bedroom into the drawing-room by way of the study, immediately before my entrance into the study.

I heard Johnnie's voice, soft and gentle now.

"Then she'll be at Brondesbury to-morrow at three?"

And the answer: "Yes."

It was Inez who had answered.

I said to myself: "I'd better not let them even suspect that I've overheard that." And instead of going in to the drawing-room direct, I went back into the hall, where I encountered Mary, coming from the direction of the bedroom. She was self-conscious.

"And well you may be, my child!" I thought grimly, sardonically, with ironical malice that equalled Mary's own. Indeed, women, even one's sisters, were astounding! Here Mary and Johnnie had both taken Inez into their confidence. And Inez and Mary had been discussing rendezvous in the bedroom! Why? What could be the significance of all this whispering chicane? Well, so long as it amused them, I should be content! Mary and I entered the drawing-room together.

Still the same awkwardness between all four of us, the same timidity in meeting one another's eyes!

"I'd sent for a taxi," said Inez to me. "I hope you haven't contrived to get two."

"No," I said. "That's all right."

The captain went forth hurriedly in search of his overcoat. There was a certain confusion and considerable hurry. Mary accepted quite tranquilly the information that Johnnie meant to accompany her to her train, she who had shrunk from him because he was including her in a sketch!

We all went out into the hanging gallery together, the girls talking. The lift, a cube of light, shot up at great speed and stopped with a jerk opposite our faces. The doors clicked open, and the uniformed infant stepped out, saluting us in quasi-military fashion. Mary and the captain went into the lift, and the child followed, caging them in, and for an

instant they hung there, close to each other, in the intimacy of the lift, smiling naively. It seemed to me that they were already united. At any rate, their sudden departure like that, with the knowledge in their hearts of the rendezvous for the morrow which Inez had doubtless helped to arrange during the interminable secret gossip in the bedroom, presented itself to me as having in it something of the irrevocable. "And they do not suspect that I know!" I reflected. Though why there should be a conspiracy and, if a conspiracy, why I should be omitted from it, I could not determine. Then the lift sank swiftly away and the steel ropes trailed after it from the ceiling into the depths.

We re-entered the flat, Inez and myself. I went straight to the drawing-room, opened wide the window and stood out on the balcony. The night was warm, and high above the gas-lamps of the square, higher even than the balcony, the elm-trees waved uneasily, apprehensively, in the evening breeze.

Underneath me I could see the forward-half of the roof of a toy taxi-cab. The other half was thrown back. Three little figures, one white, flashed across the pavement, and two got into the vehicle, while the third slammed the door. I could hear the strong, resonant voice of Johnnie saying:

"Baker Street."

And the cab began to describe a curve, rounding like a boat into the middle of the Square and so toward Bayswater Road. It moved silently, as though creeping after prey. Then, as it approached the thoroughfare, it gave a stern double 'toot,' and vanished into London. And they were in it together, the opposing temperaments, piquantly imprisoned. I thought: "For him, at the end of all his adventures. Mary—the prim and English Mary—has become the eternal feminine!" And: "This will be far better for her than continually worrying about the bringing-up of her child. She's got something else to think about now." I was glad. I was almost joyous.

Chapter XI: The Thunderclap

When I re-entered the room from the balcony, Inez was again sitting at the piano, idly turning over the pages of Ravel's "Miroirs." She did not look at me: she gave no sign of being aware of my presence. There had been a certain self-conscious stiffness in the relations of the four of us,

previous to the guests' departure, and this had been caused by the obvious effect of Johnnie's personality on Mary's. Now a more intimate awkwardness lay between Inez and me. I judged that it was due to the sense of expectation in both our hearts, the sense that a new crisis, a solemn and decisive movement in our lives was at hand; for I was convinced from her demeanour that Inez had divined in me the birth of a different attitude toward her. I was nervous, and she also. The future depended upon ourselves; perhaps it chiefly depended upon me, upon the tact and the courage which I should immediately display. None could disturb us. I was alone, in the most favourable nocturnal circumstances of ease, beauty, and seclusion, with this beautiful and accomplished woman. Even the bright softness of the shaded electricity descending on her hair and her nape and her hands, and on the harmonious folds of her gown, and on the dark spreading carpet around her, was an aid to the enterprise; every detail consented.

Physical thoughts shot in and out among the graver in my mind. But they were not paramount. And my reason repudiated them. I now seemed to envisage my enterprise more clearly and completely, though it was still vague. I was deliberately to seek my happiness in Inez and in the imitation of Inez. I was to occupy myself with this incomparable instrument of various pleasure which I had neglected for so long. I was to do again, and better, under the impulsion of reason what I had once done under the impulsion of instinct. I was to manipulate my existence, to prove by acts that reason did reign in me. My life, in that I was daily growing more unhappy for no assignable cause, had to be reckoned so far a failure. But the unconquerable in me would not submit to the increasing domination of ennui. I was bored; I had possibly a quarter of a century yet to live: was I going cravenly to submit to boredom during all those years each of which would be longer than the one before it? Was I ready to acknowledge so miserable a fiasco? The question answered itself.

And in my need and my peril, I approached Inez. I had been too solitary, too self-centred, too unworldly. I had committed the insolent error of living in the world as one in a foreign country who refuses to accept the standards of that country. I had despised small things. I had despised the present. And my attitude was guilty of intellectual arrogance. Inez was the heaven-sent cure and antidote. At its inception

my movement to her was egoistic. I thought not of her advantage but solely of my own. I regarded her as an instrument. But, as I reflected, my enterprise was tinged with the beautiful colours of altruism. I saw that, though her discontent had lessened, while mine had waxed, she must nevertheless have suffered much. I saw her as forlorn; and her cheerfulness and self-satisfaction as a thin crust over a horrible emptiness. We had both been the victims of capricious love; but I was the stronger, the older, the wiser— I with my condescending intellectual power—and my intellect ought at least to have had the wit and the justice to devise the expression of some sympathy with her. Because we had ceased to love I had found offence in her. True that she had found offence in me! But I ought to have been more rational! I wanted to compensate. I wanted to repair. Yes, I wanted to make her happy, to envelope her with my sympathy and comprehension and voluntary affection, as with an odour. All this sprang from egoism, from the acute realisation of my own peril. But whatever its origin, it was genuine, and it was undoubtedly a powerful medicine for my malady.

My feeling was less rapturous than first love; but it was finer. First love seemed crude, clumsy, blind, compared to it. I was acting now in the plenitude of reason and of experience. My heart was mellowed, the sweep of my brain far wider. My vision went beyond death. I knew that matter and spirit were one and were eternal, having never been created, incapable of ever being destroyed. I knew that every thought and deed reverberated in the future with everlasting consequences, and that to be true or false to the fleeting hour was to be true or false to eternity. In brief, I was religious.

Inez began to play, softly, a detached and salient phrase from the "Mournful Birds." She repeated it several times, and it resounded delicately in the room, intensely sad. But it did not sadden me. I exulted in her interpretation of it, in her quick and accurate responsiveness to the mood of the composer. I said to myself again: "After all, this woman is marvellous. Look at her, sitting there—is she not a miracle?" I reflected how much easier it was, for a man of my intellectual solitude and impatience, to live with a creature like Inez than with a creature like Mary. Mary was not receptive; she did not take impressions. She could not be cajoled with a caress or a flattery or a comforting deviation from the truth. She spent herself intellectually, and she expected others to do

the same. She could not leave things alone; she would not be put off. She was a rock, and when she collided with other rocks, the jar was afflicting. I admired and respected her. I had a great affection for her. But I said to myself that if I had to live with her I should expire of fatigue and loss of blood. Whereas Inez could be managed. Inez had none of that terrible hatred of compromise. You might call her intellectually dishonest; but it would be fairer to say that she attached no importance to intellect either honest or dishonest; she perhaps feared it slightly. She existed among her instincts on the æsthetic and emotional plane. She was never really ashamed of her instincts. Call her less advanced than Mary; call her nearer the savage. But what a source of pleasure to all the senses! What an æsthetic delight! What extreme skill she had acquired in the expression of the responsiveness by means of which alone she could satisfy her instincts!

Now, the physical thoughts which I had repulsed gradually rose uppermost in my mind. And I did not try to repulse them. It seemed to me to be right, to be, at any rate inevitable, that they should soften the hard operations of my reason. I abandoned myself to them. She was within ten feet of me, the miracle. And suddenly I lost the sense of the mysteriousness of woman, and of Inez in particular, which had been growing in me. I knew that the mysteriousness of woman vanished the instant you brutally faced it. Boys and ageing celibates are obsessed by the mysteriousness of woman. The obsession is a sign either of immaturity or of morbidity. The mysteriousness of woman,—take her, and see then if she is mysterious!…

How could I begin my enterprise of reconstructing our two lives? The moment was pregnant with consequences. Inez still played, intermittently. I said to myself that I must do something, that I must make a start, and that to postpone might be fatal. Some act, some gesture, some word, must be launched forth. I waited for myself, as for another. And expectancy passed into an anguish of apprehension. An enchantment lay upon us.

It was she who broke it, by saying, without looking round:

"I wonder if they were in time for the train."

I laughed. "If they weren't, it would be no new thing, for him, at any rate. However," I added, with a touch of gay quizzicalness, "you may depend on his being prompt to-morrow."

"To-morrow?" she questioned, in a peculiar, uncertain tone, still without turning round.

"Yes," I said. "At Brondesbury, at three." Assuredly there was laughter in my voice. I was jocund. I deemed it bizarre—this rendezvous between Mary and Johnnie at Brondesbury at three, this rendezvous which they had concealed from me, but of which Inez had been the privy agent. But I accepted it in excellent humour, and I saw no reason why I should hide my knowledge of it from my wile.

Then came the thunderclap.

"You've been listening—you've been eavesdropping!" she exclaimed harshly, in the hoarse tone of one who is parched by thirst. She revolved on the music-stool, and faced me. She was angry, acutely inimical: to what extent I did not immediately realise.

"My dear girl——" I murmured, at a loss.

The expression of her features made me feel sick with fear. I do not exaggerate. The whole pose of her body indicated a violent emotion of bitter hostility toward me. All her grace had gone. I was dumbfounded. I was completely mystified. I was put to shame. I could not think. Slowly —and yet how rapidly!—there formed itself in my mind the idea that I was to be the victim of some irremediable and astounding disaster. The room was changed into a theatre of fate, and it seemed extraordinary to me that the electric light should be burning as usual.

"Don't!" Inez cried. "I won't stand any more. I won't stand it! I told Johnnie all along you guessed. But he wouldn't believe me. How long have you known?"

"Known what?"

She answered in a smothered voice, looking at the carpet: "About Johnnie and me."

I offered no reply. I could not speak. The whole feverish energy of my brain was employed in a tremendous readjustment of all my notions of the immediate past and of that evening. I was like a man who has stumbled on a cipher-key which turns a series of harmless and agreeable phrases into some dire and convincing prophecy of woe. I said nothing. I was aware of a terrific desire to rise and wrench the electric chandelier out of the ceiling, and with it to destroy everything fragile in the room. By an immense, a too costly effort, I restrained myself, for I surmised that if I yielded to the desire I should rave into madness. I sat still.

I had remembered a habit of Johnnie Hulse's. When he wished to cajole, to be tender, he would address a woman in the third person, as one addresses a charming child. I had heard him do it more than once; I well recall one occasion in the promenade of the Ottoman Theatre of Varieties.

"Cur!" she said, blazing on me. "I wonder you weren't ashamed.... No, I don't! I don't!... Keeping up all this pretence that you thought it was Mary he was keen on! And then asking him to dinner on the top of everything! And keeping it up all the evening, like you did!... Well, it serves you right! But you needn't think I didn't know! I felt it all the time. Johnnie thought he had persuaded me I was wrong, and I tried to be persuaded. But I never was! I never was! I've known for days you knew. I expect you thought yourself frightfully clever and superior—horrid old cat playing with two mice. Well, you weren't so clever as you imagined. I knew you knew! I knew! And I didn't care! And I don't care!"

She paused. Then she exploded in supreme scornful disgust:

"It was just like you!"

She did not move. Nor did I. All the faces in all the pictures seemed to wait.

A voice which issued from my lips, said coldly to Inez:

"You are very melodramatic. I did not know. I knew nothing. I suspected nothing at all. I did by mere accident overhear him saying: 'Will she be at Brondesbury at three?' But I thought he meant Mary, because I had Mary in my mind."

She shook her head violently, determined to disbelieve.

"You've simply given yourself away," said the same cold voice.

("It is astonishing," I thought, "that I should be talking calmly like this. Has something snapped in my head?")

She would have given worlds to be able to continue to disbelieve, to be able to condemn me in her heart as an icy and devilish mocking monster of horrible guile. But she could not. She remained silent.

"You've simply given yourself away," the voice numbly repeated.

"Well," she rasped. "What if I have! Now you know! And I'm glad!"

She jumped up from the music-stool, turned on her heel, flung back the tail of her skirt with a characteristic gesture, and walked slowly and proudly from the room into the study, the door of which was still ajar.

Her skirt followed her, as it were reluctantly, round the jamb of the doorway and vanished. The door banged. I was alone with the furniture and the hangings and the pictures, and all these dead things had life, were tingling and trembling to the thunderclap. Only I was calm and cold.

Chapter XII: In the Study

The classic deceived husband, fatuously blind: I had been that! How often in my life had I smiled at the proverbial philosophy of those artists in adultery, the French, who postulate the stupid vanity of the male spouse; superiorly thinking that no matter what wife I might have chanced to marry, that particular mishap could never overtake *me* unawares!

There it was!

I saw everything in a new light. There was nothing, in the recent behaviour of Captain Hulse and Inez, which did not seem to contribute proof of their guilt. Even the sudden throwing up of her hands when she was reading Ravel's music—how unlike her that was, really! It had always been a point of honour with her never to stop when she had once began to read music at sight, until somehow she arrived triumphant at the end. That she should have so thrown up her hands was absolute proof of inquietude due to some recondite cause. Undoubtedly, the tenor of the evening had affected her profoundly. The situation, aggravated by her secret conviction that my ignorance of it was assumed, had lacerated her nerves till she scarcely knew what she was doing. And I had not suspected! Her silences, her baffling demeanour, her self-consciousness had been due not in the slightest degree to her preoccupation concerning my new attitude toward her, but to something quite other. It was certain that she had not perceived any change in my attitude towards her. She had, of course, not guessed that I was conceiving new lives for us both. And I had not suspected! Imbecile egotism!

Those two had swathed and swathed me in deceit. They had, for example, taken advantage of my naive interest in the fact that Johnnie had impressed my sister. Johnnie, at any rate, had judiciously fostered in me the illusion that the attraction was mutual. He had utilised my sister as a cover for my wife. Or, at any rate, he had seen no reason why he

should deprive himself of my sister's diverting tongue because he happened to be making love to my wife. How preposterous ever to have supposed that a man like Johnnie would make love to a woman like my sister—with her ideas! Yet I had supposed it. How audaciously and how successfully he had practised on my simplicity! I could hear him discreetly hinting to Inez, in the drawing-room, before Mary had come and before I had come, that he should 'play up' to Mary for my benefit during the evening. I could catch the calm cynicism of his tone.... All the subsequent self-consciousness, which I had set down to a general perception of a nascent passion between Johnnie and Mary, had sprung from an origin infinitely more complex. Nay, more! I could believe now that Mary's sudden departure might have been owing to a lightning of the truth in her mind. Woman's intuition, and so forth! Who could say?

And I had celebrated the occasion with champagne.

Of course Johnnie's conduct was infamous! It would have been infamous without the astounding insult to my sister. That made it merely ineffable. Yes, but in my heart I did not feel it to be infamous. I could not, to myself, argue like a fashionable K.C. in the Divorce Court. My opinion of Johnnie as a man of honour scarcely fell. So far as Johnnie was concerned I regarded my case as the case of some third person. I knew that the code of honour does not run in the kingdom of passion. In that kingdom everything became suddenly 'different,' all laws being abrogated, I knew that Johnnie would not be ashamed. He would be annoyed when he knew of Inez's confession; he would sympathise with me. But he would not blush. I knew that no man whose mind was broad and vigorous enough for me to respect it, would refuse to take the hand of Johnnie Hulse because the dog had made his intimate friend a cuckold. Useless to talk about ruining a home, outraging hospitality, base deceit, flagrant immorality! Phrases! Phrases! Unsupported by the genuine opinion of either men or women. She loved him; she had ceased to love me. Her life was a desert with me; he was the oasis to slake her thirst for romantic sympathy. Hence, all was permitted, all was excusable.

Do you know what I resented more than anything? Her solicitude in the bedroom when she learnt that I had forgotten my tea! Her 'Morrice!' half petulant and half maternal! Her 'my poor boy,' ditto! Her good-humoured, reproachful raised finger when I came late into the drawing-

room for dinner! Shameful acting! Acting beyond the bounds of cynicism! And if all this was not acting, if it came naturally to her, then it was even worse; it was immoral in a deep and universal sense, surpassing the sexual.

Why Brondesbury? Had the fellow got a second garçonnière (oh, language of the French, we could not do without you, in these matters!) up at Brondesbury? If so, the choice of Brondesbury was a fair example of the wild and yet wise humour which pervaded his amorous life! But he had never breathed the quaint name of Brondesbury to me!... Well, naturally!

Perhaps she was not yet his mistress. I did not know. I knew naught save that they were presumably all in all to each other. And I should never inquire. Words give existence to things. In some circumstances speech is morbid, and the desire for speech a demonstration of weakness.

Well, she had caught him, too! He, too, was down at her level, forced into all the pretences and self-deceptions which are inevitable when intelligence must subordinate itself to instinct. I pitied him—him a distinguished artist, a powerful and original individuality, my equal, creatively far more than my equal.

I had indeed chosen a suitable moment to expend my sympathy upon her, to occupy myself with the question of her happiness, and even the question of her eternal welfare! My heart had been sending out to her waves of human affection; my conscience had been exercised concerning my obligations to her. I had drawn close to her. I had dissolved in tenderness. I had excused her. I had reprimanded myself. I was plotting her bliss. And, the while, she and Johnnie were all in all to each other. Reward of virtue! Reward of fatuity!

I knew that my case was hopeless now. The sole way of escape was gone. I was ruined, beaten. I should have to acknowledge my life a fiasco. Nothing could save me from that humiliation, nor avert the disaster of the middle-age and old-age. I had just to set my teeth,—and exist. There is a certain satisfaction in hopefulness amidst the extreme of misery. You press it to you, as the martyr clutched the burning faggot. You enjoy it. You savour, piquantly, your woe, your shame, your abjectness, the failure of your philosophy. You celebrate the perdition of the man in you. You want to talk about it, brazenly; even to exaggerate it, and to swagger over

it. Neither in the world, nor in my sanctuary, could I distinguish any ray of promise. I abandoned myself to despair and bitterness, as to the bosom of a woman. I saw the years passing slowly over me as I lay supine.

Then I heard a faint regular sound of sobbing, which came from the study. Instead of retiring to the bedroom, as she ought to have done, Inez had halted in my study, and was making a foolish scene there by herself, to herself. I had a desire to go to her. But I thought angrily: "No. I won't go near her. She can blubber there all night for all I care." Still, I had a desire to go to her. Perhaps it was to triumph over her; perhaps it was to show her with calm impartiality how far I was above her; perhaps it was to clutch my faggot; or perhaps it was the mere housemaidish hankering to talk, talk, repeating the same idea a thousand times, when words are viciously futile.

I rose. A force within me was driving me toward her. My movements were curiously clumsy. I had a strong recurrence of my former impulse to wrench down the electric chandelier. But again I refrained, I yawned. Glancing at myself in the mirror of the overmantel, I saw nothing abnormal in my appearance. It did not appear to me that I was even paler than usual. I opened the study door, full of morbid curiosity. My limbs continued to be very maladroit in executing the orders of my brain.

The electricity was not turned on in the study, but through the uncurtained window there came enough diffused luminosity to show dimly the various objects in the room. At first I did not see her, for at the noise of the door she had ceased sobbing. Then I distinguished her form, at the desk. She was seated in my writing chair; her left elbow was on the desk and her head lay on her left hand. She had chosen my writing-chair, in which no one ever sat but me, for weeping; she was weeping on my blotting pad! It was, I thought, just like a woman. But perhaps she did not know what she was doing.

I pulled at the little electric knob, and a cascade of light descended upon her. I meant to avoid the sentimentality of twilight scenes. Now I could see the tear marks below her eyes.

Without moving her head to look at the, she began to speak, and at the sound of her voice, her sobs recommenced, breaking up her sentences.

"It's no use," she whimpered. "I couldn't stand it any longer… I couldn't stand it. You don't know… You think you know everything, but you don't.... A woman like me can't do without love.... I've stood it too long … getting up in the morning with the feeling that no man in the world was thinking about me—was neither happy nor unhappy because of me. How many years have I stood that?.... Do you suppose I got used to it?… Never! And I never should! Not if I was a hundred!… You don't understand what my life is.... You don't understand life at all."

"I understand what common-sense is," I said calmly. "What good do you think you're doing by talking like a schoolgirl? Damn it! You're thirty-four. You know as well as I do that I've always done the decent thing by you—and am *I* blaming you for gallivanting with your friend the captain? It's your affair. What good can you possibly do by talking about it—at any rate to me?"

"Decent thing by me!" she exclaimed, before I had finished speaking. "Never! You never did the decent thing by me!. You never thought of any soul on this earth except yourself.... You never really thought of anything but your work."

"Well," I put in, with a short, condescending laugh, "work is work!"

"What's your work to me?" she went on. "You took me. And then you left me to take care of myself while you worked. Even when you were kissing me you thought about your work. Do you think I couldn't see it in your eyes? Your work was more important to you than any woman—any human creature.... Work's all very well for you.... But even *you* only worked because something made you.... Everybody doesn't want to work.... It depends how you're born.... What's your work to me?… What good did it ever do to me?… It isn't I who 'm famous.... It isn't I that people bow down to, and that the newspapers talk about.... I haven't got a great brain, and, what's more, I don't want one. All that I want is for someone to be thinking about me!"

"I didn't know you were so desperately miserable," I said. "You've had everything you've asked for, anyhow, for a long time now!" ("The worst of women," I reflected crossly, "is that they make you talk when you don't want to.") I added aloud, in spite of myself: "I always did everything I could for you."

"I haven't had everything I wanted!" she cried. "And you never did do everything you could for me!… You never sacrificed a single half-hour

of your work for me!… Because you honestly thought with your fearful selfishness that your work was more important than your wife."

I shrugged my shoulders. She did not shift her gaze from the door communicating with the bedroom. Her right hand drummed hysterically on the desk. I looked away, and my eye caught the little masterpiece of Johnnie Hulse, which hung near the door where I stood.

"You'd much better not excite yourself," I murmured. "You'd much better go to bed—instead of stopping here."

"And there's another thing," she burst out, ignoring my advice. "Supposing Johnnie and I do care for each other?… Whose fault is that?"

"No doubt, mine," I said frigidly.

"Not yours, and not anybody's!… If you fall in love, you fall in love, and there you are!… When you fell in love with me—who asked you to? You couldn't help it. Neither could I.... We just did what we had to do.... And when we didn't care for each other any more, we couldn't help that either! If either you or I had been married when we first met, would that have made any difference? Would you have left me alone? You know it wouldn't, but you haven't got the moral pluck to say so. Nobody preached at you when you had rheumatic fever and made everyone miserable for weeks and weeks.... Nobody said you ought to be ashamed of yourself for having rheumatic fever, because, of course, you couldn't help it.... Well, can Johnnie and I help it?… It's just luck if you don't happen to fall in love with someone you oughtn't to fall in love with. And naturally it's always the lucky people who preach!"

"I'm not preaching," I said politely. "You've got your religion—I expect you know what you're about."

"Don't talk about my religion," she protested. "That's another thing. You always make fun of my religion. And if I were to die now, I should die in mortal sin, because I didn't go to mass last Sunday. I saw *him* instead.... And *that's* what love is to me! And I don't care if I do die in mortal sin.... But you don't understand. You can't. You're too cold.... You only understand semiquavers."

I smiled and moved toward the drawing-room. "I ought never to have left it," I said to myself. It seemed inconceivable that only a few minutes earlier I had meant to be kissing this Inez.

"I'll leave you," I said. "All I have to say, and all I shall say, is that I should have thought you or Captain Hulse would have had more common-sense, to put it no higher. Not to mention the scandal, you're simply making misery for yourselves. And the funny thing is that you know it. You aren't such a fool as not to be able to see that. And I'm certain *he* isn't! And what are you doing it for—because you can't help it? …You'll excuse me saying it, but you make me sick with your infantile arguments. Sick!"

I could feel anger rising within me again. And I scorned both of them intensely for their vulgar disregard of their own dignity, and for that decency the maintenance of which was to me perhaps the most sacred of civilised obligations. I turned.

"Morrice!"

She now looked at me.

"Well?"

"I've never—Johnnie and I—you know what I mean——"

"Been his mistress?"

"Never! I swear it!" She gave a grandiose gesture.

"I'd sooner you'd be his mistress than be melodramatic," I replied. "What do I care whether you've been his mistress or not? I neither believe you nor disbelieve you. Besides, to-morrow, at Brondesbury, at three…"

I raised my hands. The sarcasm in them cut her to fury.

"You think yourself very clever," she almost shrieked. "I wish you could hear Johnnie make fun of *you,* just for five minutes! Oh, I wish you could!"

The immense and cruel injustice of which I was the victim filled me with a cyclonic resentment. I had a tremendous desire to snatch down Hulse's painting from the wall and smash it to pieces. But I refrained. I controlled myself. The picture was beautiful, masterful. Better possibly for me if I had not kept such a rein on myself! Better if I had exploded! I moved further towards the drawing-room; that is to say, I meant to move, but did not. Then I meant to speak—it was an appeal for help—but did not. Then I was conscious of the most acute physical pain, and I fell to the floor. Only afterwards did I learn that this intolerable, suffocating, stabbing pain was caused by a paroxysm of the heart

Chapter XIII: The Doctor

"Send for the doctor," I implored her, speaking in gasps with the greatest difficulty. "I'm dying."

I knew that some great physical disaster had happened to me and that I was dying. I knew that I could not bear for very long the intense, almost incredible pains that had seized me about the region of my heart. There were loud reverberations in my head.

Inez's face was transfigured by alarm. Her first impulse was, of course, to raise me from the ground. "No, no!" I begged feebly, like a tortured child. Our relations were now utterly changed. I had forgotten everything except my bodily organism, which alone interested me. I had no strength, and she had much strength. I would have descended to any moral abjection in order to persuade her not to use her strength in ways contrary to my instinct of self-preservation. And that instinct was to remain exactly as I was. I was supporting the upper part of my body on my two arms, my face being a few inches from the carpet and my legs twisted under me. I breathed very quickly, in short breaths. I was afraid to breathe. All my muscles were tense in the effort of bearing the pain. Rapidly, wildly, between two breaths, I despairingly begged:

"Doctor!"

She hesitated, and then, rising from her bent posture, ran from the room. The pain extended down my left arm. But I dared not move. I could hear her at the telephone, speaking in a low, excited tone.

"Yes, yes," I whispered to myself. "That's it. That's it. Quick! Quick! I can't stand it much longer."

I heard Inez saying at the telephone: "Is that you, doctor?… Yes, at once.... In a cab, please. His heart,—something."

"That's right!" I whispered to myself. "He's at home. What luck! What luck!"

A door shut sharply, and there was a complete silence. I guessed that Inez was calling the servants, who had probably gone to bed. When she returned to me, I lifted a little my humiliated head. The pain had slightly diminished; but it was still what is commonly called intolerable.

"I must sit in a chair," I entreated. She was omnipotent. She had me at her mercy. My eyes appealed to her like the eyes of a slave.

"Better lie down," she suggested, with the intensely irritating wise kindness of all-powerful all-wisdom.

"No, no!" I besought. "Easy-chair! … I must lean forward."

She assisted me to an easy-chair. I sank into it, and with my right arm pressed against its arm, I leaned forward over it, sideways. The pain increased, and then diminished again, irregularly. My breathing continued to be very rapid and shallow.

"Some brandy?" she suggested.

I shook my head. "Wait! wait!" I whispered impatiently. I could scarcely believe that the pain was lessening. The fact seemed too good to be true. But it was true. I emitted an "Ah!"

Inez kneeled in front of me, and held my left hand.

"Is he coming?" I whispered.

She nodded encouragingly.

"Good!" I whispered. But I was not in the slightest degree reassured. I knew that I was dying. I had no hopes of the doctor. But I wanted to die properly, with the minimum of torture and of ignorant clumsiness.

"Bring me a mirror!" I said.

As the pain slowly decreased, her moral empire over me decreased. I did not feel so dependent upon her.

"A mirror?" she questioned.

"Yes," I said. "Hand-glass—anything. I want to see myself.... Go on!" I added commandingly, as she faltered. Owing to the extraordinary reverberations in my head, I could only hear indistinctly even my own words.

She went into the bedroom and came back with a hand-mirror, and held it so that I could see my face. My face was pale, with a curious flush under the wild eyes, and glistening with perspiration. My hands too perspired. Yet I was chilled to the marrow. I gazed long at my image, at the poor, drawn, beaten, condemned, undignified figure, trying somehow to rend its secret. Then I shut my eyes.

"He'll be here in a minute," said Inez.

"I'm so cold," I said.

She fetched an eiderdown from the bedroom, and dropped it gently over my shoulders.

"That's better!" I said. "I'm better, I'm a little better."

So I was, but I only told her in order to prevent her from worrying me with remedial offers. I desired peace. Though I suffered less, I still knew that I was dying. The mirror had confirmed that.

The doctor arrived. His cab was not overset en route, nor did anything untoward happen to him. He arrived, and within a space of time which even to me did not appear outrageously long. I caught a murmur of voices outside the study door; Inez ran to the door; and then the doctor entered, clad in his eternal frock-coat, and trousers that were round, like stovepipes, quite ignoring the indispensable crease down the front. He was the doctor of the days of my poverty, and had a fatiguing and unremunerative suburban practice in the region of Notting Hill. I had retained him in my prosperity, partly because he was a very clever man of wide-reaching experience, partly because I thought that he 'understood' me, partly because it appeared to me unjust to deprive him of a client; but chiefly because I appreciated his dry, crackling, sardonic temperament and his curt attitude to humanity. Moreover, he had a secret passion for music. Once, when I had called on him, we had played some pianoforte duets together. If he could have concealed more effectually his sardonic pleasure in the droll spectacle of mankind, he would have been a wealthy practitioner, spending half his time in an electric brougham. His 'bedside manner' could only please a philosopher. He had reached the age of fifty, and had lost nothing but hair. He always spoke in an exceedingly quiet voice—so quiet sometimes as to be scarcely audible.

I said nothing as he approached me, bending down.

"Can you hear anything going on in your head?" he inquired mildly.

"Can't hear anything else," I replied grimly.

"Um!"

"What is it?"

"Cardiac murmur," he said. He was examining me. No need to take *your* clothes off to examine you. Could hear it a mile off. You'll be better soon." Then he glanced at my wife through his glittering gold-rimmed spectacles. "We shall want some hot-water bags."

"I've had water put on to boil," said Inez.

"Got any mustard leaves?"

She reflected. "Yes."

"Um! You might let me have two or three hot-water bags as quickly as you can and as hot as you can."

"Must we get him to bed?" she asked.

"No, no!" said the doctor. "He mustn't be moved yet."

And I thought: "What did I tell you? Didn't I tell you?"

Inez departed. The doctor felt my pulse.

"What is it?" I asked.

"A hundred and sixty," he answered after a pause.

"I mean—what's up?"

"Well," he said, "Angina pectoris. But you're getting better every second. I suppose you've had a shock, my boy? What's happened?"

I was disinclined to talk; that is to say, I wished only to ask questions, not to answer them. However, I said gloomily and reluctantly:

"Oh! A bally row!

"Um!"

Inez and Marion, after marvellously little delay, came with the apparatus of mustard leaves and hot-water bags. Marion, in deshabille, was wearing a garment which I recognised as a cast-off dressing-gown of Inez's. Her hair was loose. No cap, no apron, no tight black frock! But the spectacles!

"That will do, Marion, for the present," said Inez.

"Yes'm"

In a moment I was enveloped in mustard leaves, hot-water bags, and rugs. And then all the pain vanished, and it was as though the whole phenomenon of pain had been removed from the entire earth. The surcease, I thought, was not due to the applications; but by chance it coincided with them. I leaned voluptuously back in the easy-chair, and smiled at the doctor. In my smile was something of sheepishness, for I was ashamed of the helpless, brutish condition to which acute pain had abased me. I had an instinctive idea that I owed an apology for it to fellow-creatures.

"By God!" I muttered. "By God!"

The noise was reverberating in my head as loudly as ever.

"Yes," said the doctor in response to my curiosity—he was sitting down now—"I can tell you precisely. It's all due to that severe endocarditis you had when you had your rheumatic fever. Dilated heart means a weak heart. If you'd stopped in bed longer the valves might have recovered themselves. But you wouldn't stop in bed, and they were permanently affected."

He did not say this with reproach or with regret. He merely recorded it as an impartial observer, that quite naturally, quite humanly, I had

disregarded his urgent advice to remain in bed a long time after the rheumatic fever.

A quarter of an hour later he left, saying that I might go to bed as soon as I felt equal to the effort, and that there was nothing else to be done. He arranged with Inez that Marion should dress and follow him to the surgery for a cardiac tonic which he would prepare.

My wife and I then sat silent together.

In another half-hour I announced that I could and should go to bed. On her arm I walked easily to the bedroom. I obstinately and even angrily insisted upon undressing myself. I would only allow her to take from me the various articles of attire as I shed them. Yet I knew that I was wrong in thus unnecessarily wasting my strength, and the clumsiness of my movements was remarkable.... Then I was in bed, lying on my back. The noise in my head continued. I remained sure of my approaching death.

Chapter XIV: The Night

All had happened so swiftly that the mind was, as it were, left breathless. I could see this mental state in my wife's face.

"Better go to bed now," I suggested quietly; my voice was fatigued and feeble.

She pursed out her lips, and raised her eyebrows, at the same time slightly shaking her head, in the expression of a negative. I comprehended that she had endeavoured to make this refusal kindly and persuasive, and that she wished to prove to me the devotion which my condition had inspired in her. Naturally, we could not converse, even had I been sufficiently strong and sufficiently interested in life to converse. Our acute self-consciousness would in any case have prevented us from an exchange of ideas. Her confession, her bitterness, my cruel irony, lay freshly between us. Impossible for us to have been natural! What could we have said? We were none the less bound together by my sudden physical danger and need. She had to watch over me, I had to depend upon her—and we could not even look each other in the face! She remained at the foot of my bed, not pouring hope into me from brave, affectionate eyes, but with glance averted, troubled and guilty. At length she sat down on a chair. I could not see her head, but parts of her ribboned dress were visible to me. I seemed to doze. Then

I heard gentle movements. She was changing her tea-gown for a plain dressing-gown. Her gestures had recovered all their grace.

I pitied her. My rancour, and the sense of my deep injury, had expired. As I lay in a sort of ecstasy of exhaustion, and watched her, I thought that she and I had been together for innumerable years, that we had been intensely intimate in very varied circumstances, that each had a profound knowledge of the other's character, and that all was now finished; the vivid, lovely, and mournful chapter closed!... A melancholy sweet and languorous as the summer night impregnated me. I found a faint pleasure in it.

And as I lazily watched her I thought: "I am leaving you, and I am leaving you to unhappiness. You will have money in plenty, you will be free, but you yourself will be the continual source of your own unhappiness." I pictured a future for her, with Captain Hulse, for example. That idyll could never endure. Use would inevitably stale it till it withered. And then what? Another idyll? And then what? Then the dreaded approach of middle age; the decadence of that wondrous body —supreme disaster! What tragic mournings were in store for her! What tears, what humiliations! At forty, without the strong moral support of a man who understands her deeply, and cares for her, such a woman as Inez is worse than dead. And I felt, despite her fierce accusation that I had never understood her, that no one would ever grasp the basis of her character as I had grasped it, and that no one would be capable of being so tolerant as I could have been—in the future.... And then I pictured a different future for her. She might, in a paroxysm of contrition, definitely repulse Johnnie. She might argue with herself, in her theatrical, sentimental way, that they two could not link their hands across my tomb. She might become a nurse, or even a nun. Yes, a nun, fervent in protestations! I saw her amidst conventual gardens, endeavouring to convince herself that she was content, and all the while the desire for opera-boxes and jewels and men burning her soul like quicklime! I saw her in old age, fantastic and ridiculous! And it seemed to me that I alone could have saved her.

These thoughts were not acute enough to be painful. I was too tired, too resigned, to feel acutely. But they gently emphasised my sadness.

A timid knock at the door. The spectacled girl entered. This singular, baffling damsel was now again fully clothed in her conventional black

and starched white, even to the cap and the cuffs. She had brought the medicine, with glass and spoon, on a salver. Inez deciphered the label on the bottle and looked at the spoon.

"Thank you."

"I shall sit up, m'm," Marion whispered.

"I tell you what you might do," Inez whispered back. "You might rest on the settee in the drawing-room. Tell cook she can go to bed."

Marion bowed to the command and withdrew.

I objected to the medicine, but I knew that I should be compelled to take it; and I did so,—a complicated business. When it was over, I murmured to Inez:

"Mirror!"

I was careful to say 'mirror,' instead of 'glass,' lest she might think I wanted the medicine glass, and fatiguing explanations might ensue.

"Oh, no!" she said mildly. You don't really want that again."

"Yes, yes."

She had to bring it, and hold it above my eyes, as I lay gazing perpendicularly upward. I saw the terribly drawn, apprehensive face, with its waxen skin, once more. I thought: "They too, since they see this face, must know that I am dying." The reverberations in my head had ceased.

She removed the mirror.

A moment afterwards I felt her startled eye upon me. And I perceived that my hands were picking aimlessly at the edge of the sheet. "That is just what dying people do!" I thought. I had not noticed what I was doing! How curious! I ceased picking at the sheet.

Then a blank! A long expanse of time! And then I became aware, gradually, that I was, after all, not in my own flat, and that, ill as I was, I must go home instantly. And I tried to go home. I insisted on going home. But inconceivably foolish persons were preventing me. I talked very rapidly, now loud, now soft, uttering the most extraordinary matters, and at intervals stopping in my frenzied discourse to clarify obscure but important points, such as my view of Johnnie Hulse's painting. Then I fought for liberty to go home. I fought ferociously. But I was gripped by two of these inconceivably foolish persons. It was two to one. Then I was shocked to discover that I was writhing on my own bed, and that Inez and Marion, on either side of the bed, were holding

me by force of arms! And how athletic they were! But they breathed heavily!

I yielded, sinking back.

Another blank.

And I heard a voice, somehow familiar, saying:

"He may or he mayn't. We can do nothing else."

And then, later, the same voice:

"It's because the eyes themselves are turned upward, like into the forehead; the pupil is gone up out of sight and so you can only see the white. He may be like that for——"

The voice stopped. It was the doctor's voice. Strange! They had been telephoning, then, and waiting, and the doctor had arrived again, and come into the room, and I had known nothing! Marion stood at attention in a corner of the room. I stirred. The doctor came toward me with a faint smile. Then I noticed another strange phenomenon. Something hot, damp, and stinging was pressing against the calves of my legs. They had uncovered me, and put poultices there, and covered me; and I had known nothing!

"Here!" murmured the doctor persuasively.

He put a small glass to my lips.

I smiled. It was the smile of one sardonic philosopher to another.

After an interval the doctor departed, and Inez followed him out of the room. Marion remained to watch, respectfully glancing at me from moment to moment. I was fully conscious and in my right mind, but ineffably weak. Then Inez silently returned, and, at a gesture from her, Marion withdrew silently, leaving the door ajar.

Inez approached my bed. I let my head slide slowly rightwards, so that my right cheek was on the pillow, and my eye met hers. My right hand, which lay on the sheet, moved scarce perceptibly towards her. She took it, and dropped to her knees, as I had once seen her drop to her knees before an altar at the Oratory of St. Philip Neri, and her eye was level with mine.

"Did he tell you it's all up?" I questioned her. My voice seemed like the wraith of a voice.

She shook her head, as it were by force of will. And I saw moisture gathering in her bright feverish eyes. It rose and rose, and then a shower

of glistening drops burst and ran down her exquisite, pouting cheeks. This was one of the most beautiful sights that I ever witnessed.

Chapter XV: Toward Oblivion

Between the twin beds was a small, square table, and on the table stood an electric lamp with a green-silk shade. The circle of light limited by the shade included the edge of my bed and Inez's face as she knelt. Beyond the confines of the circle the whole chamber was in gloom. But I could vaguely distinguish the contours and the tints of all the beautiful furniture in the room, and I could recall the fineness of the engravings and photogravures on the unpatterned walls. And there was Inez's long plumed hat perched on the silver candlestick! The colour of the eiderdown, which had been drawn away somewhat and cast over the foot of the bed, was a reddish purple, braided with green: it showed richly, amidst the general severity of tone, like a piece of rhetoric. I mention these matters because I then savoured them with pleasure—a feeling faint but agreeable. I thought that, in dying, it was an advantage to be surrounded by phenomena that could not wound—could only soothe—the glazing eye.

Inez rose, looked at me for an instant, and moved away into the gloom. She appeared to me extraordinary healthy, in a state of high physical efficiency. She was like an incarnation of perfectly co-ordinated energy. And I thought what a wonderful and lovely thing was a sound body in good health! Although this phenomenon too pleased me, it also inspired in me a certain feeble resentment. I, ruined, did in fact resent the active competence of that organised frame. It struck me as insolent. And yet a few hours previously my own body had displayed the same insolence of power. And my undoing was due to an irrational and disobedient impatience after rheumatic fever a year ago! I would, then, in my growing strength, quit my bed. And now, as a consequence, I could not quit it, should never quit it. Curiously strange, the inexorability of nature!

Exactly opposite the foot of my bed was the door leading to the study. This door was wide open, and the vista of the study, ending in a French window, met my eyes when they came to rest in the natural position of repose. No lamp burned in the study. There were dim hints of glossy reflections, and the window made an oblong of bluish twilight.

The window was ajar; its two wings stirred slightly from time to time, and the white lace curtains stirred, bellying capriciously and then flattening out, according to the mild, warm gusts of the July night. Through the upper part of the window I could discern a patch of silver in the sky, of an exquisite quality of colour. I had previously observed this patch from the balcony of the drawing-room, when I had looked down at the departure of John and Mary. It was the pale-gleaming vestige of a magnificent sunset, reluctant to expire, islanded amidst dark clouds in the higher heavens. I thought: "That silver cannot burn there through the night. It must fade." And I waited for it to fade. And it would not fade. I closed my eyes for immense periods, and looked again, expecting the radiance to be gone. But it was always there, making the window wonderful.

Everything was still, silent, enchanted. And out of the silence, like bubbles floating upwards to the surface of a pool and breaking there, came the solemn *tick-tick* of the antique clock in the vestibule, dominating the subdued life of the flat, and counting eternity. I thought of the cook, sleeping I knew not where, and the enigmatic Marion stretched on a settee in the dark drawing-room (a woman, beneath that tight black frock), and Inez, strong and beautiful, indistinctly near me somewhere in the green-shadowed chamber.

I saw my hand twitching and toying with the edge of the sheet again, and I stopped it.

It was a pity that the spell that brooded over the flat would be broken by my death! A pity that the subdued and apprehensive life of the flat could not remain thus forever in its beautiful immobility! The thought of the harsh and ugly disturbances inseparable from a funeral, and of the probable evacuation of the flat, and of the invasion of its chill emptiness by loud-voiced, insincerely-disparaging flat-hunters,—this wounded and worried me. However, there would be plenty of money for Inez. She would be put to no shifts.... Strange that none of these people believed that my immediate death was sure! They all hoped, with a genuine hope that was nigh faith, for my recovery. Even the doctor had faith. Otherwise my sister would have been summoned. But they feared. I alone saw with certainty the future. And I alone was calm and untroubled.

Another long period seemed to elapse. But probably my conceptions of time were seriously falsified. I heard the clock ticking; yet, though its habit was to chime the quarters, I never heard it strike. Probably also I had a very inadequate notion of the complexity of the treatment to which I was being subjected. I seemed to have disconnected glimpses of intricate operations which kept Inez busy about my bed. Once, after having adjusted the coverings, she murmured to me:

"Are you comfortable?"

And I endeavoured to nod. I must have succeeded in nodding. Then my head slipped to one side.

All I wished was to be left quiescent in the peace which was enwrapping me in heavier and heavier folds. I had no regrets for the past, and no qualms about the future. My life did not pass before me in a phantasmagoria of self-judging. I had no satisfaction concerning things done, nor did I grieve for things undone; nor did my soul weep over lost opportunities. I did not wander in the remote caverns of infancy, unvisited for decades. I saw my career in no new light. I was unaware of any remorse. The solemnity of the crisis in my immortality scarcely oppressed me at all I thought: "I am going! I am going! It is just as well! What a cutting of the knot! Let me depart!" Did I say I had no qualms for the future? Scarcely true! The great void of my indifference was shot through at intervals by thin, lancinating flashes of fear, of an unknown terror.... After all, if the passage into the new consciousness on the other side of death *should* somehow correspond in dread with the legendary superstitions of mankind! If the mighty power waiting beyond the horizon *should* after all be vindictive, should even be but scientifically just!… Then the flash was gone. I thought: "I shall soon know." And there was a certain feeble adventurous nonchalance in my mood,—the insolence, at once titanic and pert, of the human soul before an unimaginable danger!

These sensations that I describe were unimportant in the sum of my consciousness, which mainly consisted in a fierce physical egotism caused by exhaustion of the body. My body had my brain in subjection. I knew that my face was not drawn and anxious now. I knew that it could express nothing but the intense need of repose. All other considerations receded. I must rest. Sleep, and a state profounder than sleep! Leave me, intruders, torturers! And if you will not, I defy you to disturb me. I sink,

as it were, downwards on a canine sigh. By my side the lamp throws its bright ring on the carpet. Far in front the mysterious window shimmers in vague, translucent silver.... All!… The man lost in the snow-veiled Alpine pass, seized by slumber as by an opiate, insensately fighting his rescuers for the incomparable bliss of oblivion,—behold there my image!

Book II

Chapter XVI: Awaking

This is what I awoke to:

I was looking at my bed. My brain at first worked with much difficulty. It reasoned very slowly. Nevertheless, the argument was convincing: "I am looking at the bed. Therefore I am not in the bed." I saw the bed framed in a small oblong, of which the greater length was vertical. This oblong was the doorway between the bedroom and my study. Hence I had arrived, by some means, in the study. I was, in fact, near the open window. I had a slight sensation of chilliness, though I knew that the night was warm.

A man lay on the bed. He was a big man, as I could judge from the outlines of his shoulders under the sheet. And his head was large. His face showed white; the eyes were wide open and staring fixedly at the ceiling; the lower jaw had fallen, limp, so that the mouth was open in a senile, rather idiotic way. A man of forty or so. I was prevented by the intervening foot of the bed from seeing more than the upper half of what lay on it, and by the dimensions of the doorway from seeing anything in the bedroom except the bed. I heard a rush of footsteps, and then the electric light over the bed was turned on, illuminating crudely the face of the man, whose eyelids, however, did not blink. Then my wife appeared within the field of my vision, with the hand-mirror, which she polished carefully on a corner of the eiderdown. Thereupon she held it downward over the mouth and nostrils of the man for a long time, and then examined it, first under the ceiling-light and afterwards under the lamp on the little table. Parts of her—her head, an arm, a portion of skirt—were continually passing in and out of the oblong. She was extremely agitated. I scarcely recognised her by her features.

Nor, though it may astound, did I recognise the man on the bed. An appreciable period elapsed before I even began vaguely to realise that the body on the bed was mine. I had never seen myself save in a glass, which puts the left to the right and the right to the left, thus changing all the relations of the features. I had to reason out the identity of the body. It could be no other; therefore, it was mine.

And then the idea shot through me—not as a result of ratiocination, but as a swift fundamental perception of the instinct:

"I'm dead! This is being dead! I've died!"

Terror clutched and loosed me; retired and then approached slowly from all sides to possess me. I felt the start, the shiver, the momentary cold creeping of the skin on the spine—an instant of ineffable anguish; then numbness; then the gradual return of anguish. A sailor marooned on a desert islet, and newly aware of what had happened to him, might feebly conceive my state. Indescribable! Sickening!

I still had some sort of a physical organism, patterned apparently on the old, but differing in deep ways which, however, I was not curious enough to consider. I was still I. It was the relic on the bed that was not I.

My wife, after disappearing, came back into the oblong with a pair of scissors. She cut a hole in the pillow and drew from it a feather of down, which she cautiously poised on the lips of that body. The down did not tremble. Then she bared the breast of the body on the bed, and, bending, laid her ear upon the region of the heart. I could see her eyes blinking as she intensely listened. She was looking directly at me. The bedroom was brilliantly lit, and the study derived considerable light from it. I ought to have been quite plain, as an object. Even had the study been dark, I ought to have been notable as a silhouette against the silvery luminance of the window. Yet Inez did not see me.

I wanted to cry out: "Inez!" But I could make no sound. Nor could I move. That is to say, I could move a few inches in any direction, up or down, forward, backward, sideways, as easily as one moves in water, but I could not quit the spot where I was.

Inez straightened herself, gave a brief sob, and stood undecided by the bed. I endeavoured to attract her attention by signs,—by I knew not what, by the violence of my desire to communicate with her. But I could do nothing. Once she turned sharply, as if startled, and looked straight at me through the doorway. I strove now more frantically than ever to intercept that glance. Useless! She did not see me. She would not see me.

She passed out of the oblong. I then noticed a form floating over the bed. It resembled me—it resembled my body—in shape, but it was of a pale, greyish, heliotrope colour. It appeared to float as if in water. "My God!" I thought. "How often am I to be multiplied?" I was aghast with horror, consternation, panic, and an awful bewilderment. I could explain nothing to myself. I was terrorised and lost. And, moreover, the floating

imitation of me was obscene; the body below it was obscene. Understand me: when I say 'obscene,' I mean completely offensive and disastrous to the sight: I use the word in no limited sense. It was fatally shocking that that disgusting relic and that uncanny fluid shape should be there between the homely, earthly, comprehensible, decent electric light and the Hepplewhite bedstead.

I thought:

"Dead? Yes. What 'they' *call* dead!"

But I knew then that there was no such catastrophe as corresponded with your notion of death. There was, however, something more formidable, which we had not suspected: the forced simultaneous perception of disparate phenomena. This is the most shattering, if not the most desolating experience that the universe holds. Believe me!

I heard the voice of Inez:

"Marion!"

It was a voice charged with significance, and it told Marion the great fact. I heard a sleepy groan in the drawing-room, and dull heavy movements, becoming hastier. And then both women appeared within the oblong. Marion still wore her black frock and she was mechanically tying her apron behind. They gazed at that body on the bed, and at each other, and at the body again. They gazed at that body, commiserating and awestruck, as if it was myself that they were gazing at. Neither spoke. I wanted to rouse them to their error, so stupid, grotesque, and tragic. But I was helpless. I was in the most desperate need of sympathy, of moral succour; and they ignored me, spilling their facile tears on a mass of obscene and senseless matter. They were blind to such a point that they could not even discern the third 'me' floating idly above their heads on a level with Brangwyn's large etching of London Bridge.

Inez told what she had done. Marion ventured to bend a little closer to the body.

"I have heard," she said deferentially, "that if you put a full glass of water on the chest you can tell for sure. But perhaps you wouldn't care to, m'm."

By this time her apron was duly fastened.

First Inez and then the servant passed out of the oblong, and I caught the sound of water being poured from one vessel into another. And Inez

re-appeared holding at arm's length, and balancing with precautions, a tumbler of water.

"Turn down the sheet," she commanded.

"Oh, ma'am! I never dare!" exclaimed Marion, and burst fairly into hysteric sobs.

With a slight gesture of scornful superiority, Inez deposited the glass on the corner of the table, turned down the sheet, took the glass again, and gingerly lowered it on to the chest of that body. I could see from their faces that both women imagined themselves to be engaged in an operation dreadful and momentous. To me it was merely absurd in an exasperating degree. The ridiculousness of their manœuvre affronted my sense of propriety. From either side of the bed they stared as if spellbound at the preposterous tumbler lodged on that fleshly residue. I had never since my youth been able to envisage any act whatsoever as blasphemous. When people talked of blasphemy, I could never even fancifully reproduce their feelings in myself. Yet, then, the figures of Inez and the maid, and the decaying mass between them, and the meaningless tumbler, constituted for me, in some way, a blasphemous tableau vivant: the most monstrous spectacle that I had ever seen.

"No! Nothing!" Inez breathed.

There was not the slightest vibration on the surface of the tumbler, which she at length removed.

They were obsessed, both of them, by the majesty and solemnity of death. So much was to be seen in their impressionable faces, and audible in their voices, and visible again in their movements. They felt themselves to be alone in the flat with the dead, and they looked timidly askance at shadows, and started at faint unanticipated noises. Obviously the whole flat was alive for them with the little creeping presences that are supposed to circle round a corpse. And yet I could not force into their consciousness the fact that I was behind them, helpless and desolate. And they remained extraordinarily unaware of the weird counterfeit floating above them. I was in despair of my impotence, and outraged by the obstinacy of their error. They deemed themselves alone in the flat with the corpse; but they were alone in the flat with me; the corpse was utterly negligible; the corpse did not exist. And they were wasting upon it their sympathy, their respect, their awe. This was what most deeply perturbed me.

"I'd better telephone for the doctor, m'm, hadn't I?" whispered Marion. Terror was gripping them tighter.

"What's the use?" murmured Inez. "It would only spoil the poor man's night for nothing. He warned me—to be prepared!"

"Yes'm," said Marion meekly. "But that's what doctors are for. By rights he ought to be fetched."

She had her way.

I heard her presently enunciating with trembling distinctness the figures of a telephone number. After a time she came back to the bedroom and I heard her say that the exchange said that they could get no reply from the doctor. Silence. Neither Inez nor Marion was now within the oblong. I noticed that the greyish heliotrope apparition had risen higher from the bed, so that part of it was already hidden from me by the top of the doorway. Soon it vanished altogether, upward out of my field of vision.

Then I heard the chink of coins.

"Have you got a penny, Marion?"

"A penny, ma'am?"

"I've only got one. His eyes must be closed."

No! The spectacled girl had not got a penny. My mood became bitterly ironic. There was a considerable to-do about the second penny. And I ached for them to finish the episode. I knew that in a drawer of my desk lay over two shillings' worth of coppers; for I had made a point of storing coppers; it was one of my little tricks of habit always to have change adequate for every emergency. Inez also knew of this store of copper. But in her agitation she forgot it. So the difficulty of the other penny persisted. I wanted to recall to her that which she had forgotten. I longed with an intense longing to direct her attention to the drawer. But I could not. My impotence was appalling.

"I suppose I can use half-a-crown?" I heard Inez mutter doubtfully.

The girl ventured no reply to this suggestion.

Inez appeared within the oblong once more. She had in one hand a handkerchief folded crosswise like a muffler, and in the other two coins. She approached that body, and again put her ear to its breast and listened intently, and again stared straight at me with blinking, unseeing eyes.

Then she passed the handkerchief under that fallen jaw and so lifted the jaw and tied the handkerchief in a knot at the top of the head of that body. There was a sob from the invisible maid. And with her delicate fingers Inez drew down the eyelids of that body, and put a penny on one and half-a-crown on the other. And she straightened the arms of that body. She seemed to be acquainted with these singular rites much better than I was.

"I shall go round and tell cook, m'm," said the determined voice of the maid.

I heard footsteps, and the opening of a door far off.

Suddenly Inez threw herself down by the bed, before that body, as before an altar, and hid her face in the eiderdown, and wept.

"I did love you! I did love you!" she cried in stifled and broken tones. She was pouring out her soul in a passionate ecstasy of repentant grief. But she was pouring it out to that futile, obscene, and negligible mass on the bed, that refuse no more capable of response than a barrow-load of earth. It was *it* that she loved. And I, alive, tingling, isolate, and agonised for lack of human sympathy, stood helpless and disregarded within a few feet of her, in the twilight of the study.

Chapter XVII: Sounds of Night

Now, as, slightly waving like a stalk, I stood by the window, a feeling of acute and frightful loneliness enveloped me as it were in an icy sheet. I was solitary in the universe. I was invisible and I was forgotten. I had no place in the world, no share in life, nothing that was mine. The purposes of nature had ejected me from humanity. It was as though humanity were a fortified city, and the gates had been shut on me, and I was baffled by unscalable smooth walls, beating against their stone with my hands. Any physical torture would have been preferable to the horror caused by this feeling of ostracised solitude. It devastated my soul, laying waste the whole of it.

Marion came within the oblong of my vision, and, without a word, put her hands on Inez, and gently raised her up from the bedside and led her away beyond my view. And Inez yielded unresisting. Here were two human beings, sympathetic, mutually comprehending, relying on each other, sure of each other. And the tie of living humanity which joined them seemed to me to be the most beautiful and the profoundest that

could be conceived. The simple fact that they were alive together surpassed in importance every other fact in their relationship.

The next moment the electric light was extinguished in the bedroom. But in the diffused clarity of the summer night I could still discern the monstrous shape of that body on the bed. I observed the birth of a light in the drawing-room, and heard voices. Then I heard the clock chime and strike two. It was at this point that I first perceived, in the midst of my spiritual pangs, how the sensitiveness of my auditory nerves was increasing. I could hear all the clocks of London striking, separately and distinctly—so it appeared to me. Certainly hundreds of thousands of clocks. Not merely the deep-sounding boom of cathedrals, abbeys, parliaments, and palaces, but the little hasty clocks of small interiors. I could, for instance, distinguish every clock on every floor of Palace Court Mansions. I could even hear the ticking of alarm-clocks in the bedrooms of servants, which was indeed louder than the soft discretion of the gongs of many clocks in larger chambers. This innumerable chorus of clocks continued for a long time, gradually decreasing in volume but never quite dying away. Its impressiveness was uncanny. The living speak of the uncanniness of the dead. It does not occur to them that manifestations of human existence may be uncanny to the dead.

That sensation of the uncanny ceased. I could hear, now, in the silence of the clocks, all the nocturnal stir of London. I could hear the sound of sleepers and of those who did not sleep: breathings, restless motions, murmurings, moans, groans, sharp cries, kisses, pattering of bare feet, striking of matches. I could hear the regular dropping of some dangerous medicine into a glass, and a quiet voice counting the drops, and the gurgle of swallowing, and the sigh. And I could hear laughter, and the creeping of pens over paper, and the vibrating roar of immense machinery, and the abrupt clanging of oven doors, and the march of sentinels, and the slither of dancing; and prayers.... The catalogue would be interminable. There was no confusion in my mind. I had a million ears, independently functioning.

And out of the vast material of sound I seemed to be able to reproduce for myself all the interiors of London. I saw attics, and rows of attics, where girls were sleeping uneasily, huddled together in the attitudes of exhaustion; and their black frocks and black aprons and elastic-tethered scissors were hung upon nails or cast carelessly on

chairs; and by their sides the little round fussy alarm-clocks with indicators pointing to half-past five, six, half-past six, seven; and on their tiny dressing tables photographs of men or of other girls. And I could see rooms which resembled kitchens as much as bedrooms, with men and women and children crowded on the bed, and under the bed, and in every corner, and a baby in a box, and all stertorously breathing, save perhaps one who lay awake. And I could see immense chambers, with one bed, or two, like islands rising out of smooth seas of carpet, and on the beds something just human that moved or did not move. And miles upon miles of plain average rooms, astoundingly alike in their appliances of comfort, their ornaments, and the visages and postures of their occupants; all suspended on a groundwork of empty rooms about a dozen feet above the level of the roadways. Nearly all dark, yet not quite dark! Here and there a bright light: a man writing, or reading; several men talking; a solitary bended pale woman sewing—stitch, stitch, monotonously under a lamp; yes, and even white young girls sewing doggedly and yawning! Then the prisons, black, and patterned into cells like a chessboard. And the other prisons —barracks, rising floor above black floor, similarly patterned. And the other prisons—hospitals, hotels, rising floor above floor, similarly patterned, but illuminated faintly, and alive with special activities. And then enormous cellars, bathed in bluish radiance, and filled with huge, shaking, whirring machines about which men scurried to and fro like ants.

Behind walls, all that! Secure within walls! But the roadways themselves—leagues of lighted avenues, intersecting, curving, slanting, climbing—these, too, seemed to be homely and secure under the guardianship of their quiet lamps. They all led to the inner and double safety and companionship of interiors. And the rare people that paced them on calm regular feet, or swam swiftlier over them on wheels, had the consciousness of this solace on their faces. And even those who wandered aimlessly, who crouched on doorsteps, or lolled on the iron benches of squares and embankments, even these were—how shall I put it?—at home in their homelessness. The walls of which the interior sides protected the sleepers, protected the outcasts also by their human familiarity.

I alone was solitary. I alone was cut off—by an impassable and incomprehensible barrier.... I was within walls. I was in my house. I was

near my wife and my servants; surrounded by the agreeable toys of my daily existence. Yes! But that was naught. And, moreover, I was not after all within walls, not near my wife and my possessions. I was nowhere. I had no relation to the human world. Sponged off it! And a place in the human world seemed to me to be the one object worthy of desire. In my tragic, unsuccoured, hopeless loneliness there was not one of these millions of human creatures whose burden I would not have seized had I had the power. Not a starving wretch, not a beaten child, not a pregnant spinster, not a drunken beast, not a murderer, a thief, a shamed deceiver, not a bereaved lover, not a condemned invalid, no, not even a gloved lackey, with whom I would not have exchanged lots. I would have jumped to become a dog or a cab horse. The freezing blast that moans in the hollow between two worlds nipped me, and I was naked to it.

Chapter XVIII: Marion's Thoughts

The telephone bell sharply awoke the flat with a prolonged silvery ring, rising and falling several times. There was a stir of movement in the drawing-room, and a door opened. Then I heard the conversation on the telephone. I could hear it all, both my wife's voice and the voice that whispered answers in her ear. A few minutes previously I might have been able to hear that answering voice in the very place where it spoke —away at Notting Hill. But already my hearing was less sensitive and sure than it had been. The special faculty was passing from me, as mysteriously as it had come.

"How's the patient?" asked the whispering voice, with an accent of pleasant optimism.

"Is that you, doctor?" The voice of Inez shook.

"Yes. I am called out. Just going. I thought I'd inquire before I left."

"He is gone."

"What do you say?"

"Gone!"

"Ah!" The tone of the faint whisper in her ear was suddenly changed.

"I should like you to come, doctor, if you don't mind."

"Was it sudden?"

"Yes. Quite sudden.... About an hour ago. I should like you to come round, if you could, just to see."

"Yes. I'll come as soon as I can. Good-by."

I listened with attentive ear to that short colloquy, as though it concerned me, as though it had a real interest for me. There was something sinister in the brevities of the doctor issuing, with a curious effect as of two rough surfaces being rubbed together, out of the heart of the little disc into the soft ear of Inez. "Ah!" he had emitted, upon learning that I was gone; and that was all!

I ceased to be quite so preoccupied with my terrible loneliness, and my thoughts gradually grouped themselves around the immediate future of Inez. I felt that in my absence everything that had to be done would be done wrongly or done clumsily. I foresaw ghastly sins against my desires in connection with the interment of that body. And I wished intensely to communicate to somebody, in all exact details, how the affair should be conducted so that it might not offend my sense of propriety. I knew too well that Inez would err on the side of flagrancy and spectacular emotion. If I had had anything to sacrifice (which I had not), I would have eagerly sacrificed it in order to reduce to a minimum the spiritual ineptitudes incident to a customary funeral. And although I knew that that body was nothing but unorganised matter in the shape of an organism, I was animated by a keen, vindictive repugnance to it. I blamed and hated it for the blindness of those who already had comported themselves, and those who soon would comport themselves, in front of it ceremoniously, honouring it as if it were myself—while I…

And I thought of all the mistakes that Inez would commit in relation to my estate, and the trouble she would unnecessarily raise up for herself, and the disaster which she might make of the remainder of her life. And I wondered what Mary would do without her brother. I wanted to interfere in a thousand things, the very least as well as the very greatest. I burned in a fever of anxieties and apprehensions about matters which I could in no manner influence and which could in no manner influence my lot. The sheer absurdity of most human activities worried me, and my inability to prevent that absurdity.

This obsession enlarged. And suddenly with a strange, disconcerting abruptness, I had a view of the whole human race engaged in the business of moving matter from one place to another. These creatures, to whom I was now foreign and superior (in my fearful solitude), seemed to exhaust themselves solely in this crude, physical task. It was not

merely ships, railways, trams, omnibuses, cabs, lifts, and the post. It was shops, mines, restaurants, water, light, drainage—everything that was deemed important in the important assemblages of men. Nearly the entire contents of every newspaper every day were devoted to this ridiculous question of moving matter from one place to another; it constituted nearly the whole of human history. And I was astonished that I had never before been struck by the huge, obvious fact. The more I contemplated it the more absurd it seemed to me, and the lower my estimate of humanity fell. And I said to myself, astounded, shocked: "Why! Spiritual evolution has not begun—has not begun with them! Cannot begin until they come to see what now I see so plainly! They are children! They are navvies and porters!" I was overwhelmed by the wonder of the generalisation about humanity which I had discovered.

All this was pushed violently out of my mind by the opening of the door between the study and the drawing-room. Instinctively I shrank back as far as I could into the embrasure of the window. I thought: "I shall be discovered!" And whereas a while ago I was desolate at the failure of either woman to see me, now I was afraid of being seen. I did not wish to be seen. I trembled at the possibility of being seen.

It was Marion who entered, closing the door cautiously behind her. She turned on the electric light, and looked at the window. But she did not see me. Her eyes hesitated on the window. I thought, shaking: "Supposing she decides to shut it and comes towards me, what will happen then?" For I could not escape from the immediate vicinity of the window. However, her eye left the window and wandered to the little door between the study and the bedroom. This door had remained open, and as Marion advanced into the room she could see what I saw in the bedroom. She stood still a moment, and then, resolute, went to the little door and shut it. Obviously she was relieved when she had done so. Then she sat down in my easy-chair—the most comfortable chair in the flat, the chair in which I took my after-lunch nap and which was strictly consecrate to me. And she dropped her head against one of the ear-flaps, and stretched out her legs. She was still wearing her starched apron, but no cap. Then she took off her spectacles, dropped them in one of the twin pockets of her apron, and closed her eyes.

Evidently she had deemed it contrary to etiquette that she should lose consciousness in the presence of her mistress. And so, fatigue mastering her, she had crept into the study.

Now, soon after Marion's advent, I began to lack confidence in the reliability of my senses. At any rate, the reports of my senses confused me and dizzied my brain. When you stand before a large shop-window filled with dark-coloured goods, the images of the street behind you mingle with the objects in the window. And according to the intent of your mind, those images will fade or brighten. If you wish strongly to see the objects the images will disappear. If you devote your vision to the images the objects will disappear.

I was aware of partial, fleeting gaps in the physical continuity of the room—gaps that yawned and closed again. It was as though something —nay, a whole series of phenomena—was intermittently breaking through the physical phenomena.

My spine shivered, struck cold. I was on another threshold.

What was the nature of the phenomena which were battling with the physical phenomena for the possession of my senses, I could not discern. But I saw beautiful flashes of colour, scarcely iridescences, yet the tints of iridescence. Then I perceived that Marion was enveloped in colour. I thrilled. She was surrounded by a chromatic form, somewhat larger than herself, otherwise exactly corresponding with herself. I could see *her* within it, as a sort of large nucleus of it. The colours, which were continually modified, were not susceptible of description. They were colours that I had never seen before. I experienced no surprise that I had never seen them before. I felt that I could not have seen them before. I knew, too, that that envelope (or should I call it emanation?) which surrounded Marion always surrounded her; and that it had only been invisible to eyes that could not see it. Even now I could see it but dimly, but vaguely. If I centralised my vision on the physical body of Marion, the encircling form almost disappeared, but I could not lose the body in the steadfast contemplation of its envelope.

After a period of this exquisite amazement I observed, very faintly at first, that small shapes were escaping one by one from that part of the chromatic envelope which surrounded Marion's head. They floated away. Not bubbles! Shapes more complex than spheres, shapes showing design, and the persistence of one design with minor variations! At first

I could not follow them in their easy flight. But they grew clearer to me. I traced them one after another to a corner of the ceiling. Presently I could distinguish the gradual building of each of them in the recesses of that chromatic envelope, the body being momentarily lost to sight.

Again I thrilled.

I thought, solemnly ecstatic: "They are her thoughts!"

And I was drenched in an affrighted pleasure, caused by this unique and lovely experience. It was as if my joy bedewed me.

I could see other small forms, but faintlier, gliding about the room, nearer to me. I braced my volition and my powers to follow further the disappearing forms born of Marion's form. And, by perseverance, I watched them through the ceiling to a higher floor, where, in a small room (whose outlines were misty to me), they hovered caressingly around another chromatic human form that lay on a trestle bed. Within the coloured envelope was the body of a youth. I recognised his face. I had often seen him menially engaged about the exterior of Palace Court Mansions. He was, or seemed to me now, extraordinarily handsome, and his attitude was distinguished by the graceful dignity of a fine animal.

I withdrew my peering vision from that scene.

Perhaps it was from modesty, perhaps because something unusual out in the Square had attracted me. There, a whole row of tall houses and elm-trees had faded, and I beheld a space across which thousands of forms flashed thronging. They did not fly, were not winged. And then the houses and the trees effaced them.

When I looked again into the study, the flight of Marion's thoughts had ceased. I fixed my gaze on her body. She was asleep. The physical outlines of the room seemed to dissolve, to return, trembling, distorted, and then to dissolve again. And then, slowly, I saw the chromatic envelope move entirely away from Marion's body. It floated an instant by the side of her, an etherealised Marion. It moved a little towards me, wavered, its colours subtly changing every instant, and finally it swept upward, following the direction of the stream of thoughts. And Marion calmly slept, dreaming.

Chapter XIX: A Drama

The physical world had almost dissolved away. I could see, jutting like some obstinate wreckage of a catastrophe, the upper corners of my largest bookcase, and here and there a patch of carpet, a fragment of the window, and a red Bernard-Moore vase that seemed to stand self-supported and firm on the shifting coloured currents which filled the spaces around me. I was now in the midst of a moving shimmering sea of vapours. Roughly, what I saw might be compared to the tinted smoke that drifts about the ground after a prolonged burning of Bengal lights on a calm night. But the texture of the gaseous fluid, while far finer, was at the same time closer, and the currents were infinitely more complex, though not more rapid. There were no blank interstices. Everywhere was motion, vibration, change, close-woven radiance, and enchanting beauty. The currents were marked by different colours and different shades of colour: a range of glittering and yet exceedingly soft hues unknown to my physical experience. Yes; enchanting beauty! I was enchanted; I was under a spell of wonder. I gazed exactly as an infant gazes at a bright object. I was, in fact, an infant. I knew that I could not comprehend what I saw, that my observations must necessarily be falsified by a whole series of naive misapprehensions, like the observations of a child, and that only long habit would enable me to see truly that which was before me. And I thought, how wondrous and lovely beyond visions was this spiritual world!

And then I asked: Why 'spiritual'? Why 'spiritual' more than 'physical'?

If hydrogen, if ether, is part of the physical world, why must this not be called physical? It was gaseous, but are not gases physical? It was less substantial than air, but it had substance, and I could throw it into agitation and deflect its ways. And then I saw that, as in the earthly world, so here, and so for ever, it was, and eternally would be, impossible even to conceive any phenomenon that was not fundamentally physical. Nothing could be supernatural. This gave me a feeling of comfortable security.

Through the transparent prismatic quivering sea floated shapes recalling those which had issued from the form of Marion, more brightly or more deeply coloured than the sea, each a dazzling object of beauty to me—but a beauty sometimes sinister and formidable. They moved, by

means invisible to my childish eyes, with the perfect aptitude of fishes in water—luminous fishes in a lustrous water, radiance in radiance; some wandered without apparent purpose, and these were of vague outline; others, quite definite in form though yieldingly elastic, passed onward in straight paths, urgent, as if on a secret and unique errand. Many circled around my head, melting gradually into the sea, but constantly renewed and therefore not lessening in number.

Ecstasy!

In my earthly life I had stood in ecstasy before sunsets the beauty of which my imagination could not exceed.... Now I smiled at those moments.

I steeped myself in the rapture of this new visual life.

There was a jarring sound, faint and disconcerting, like the sound from another universe. I was aware, with a dim and negligible knowledge, that it was caused by the abrupt blowing to of the window under the impulsion of some earthly breeze. And instantly, with the speed of an emotion, Marion's form swept through the translucent, prismatic sea, and came to rest, the lower limbs stretched forward and the head leaning curiously to one side. The form flashed, scintillating, sheening, incomparably brighter than the bright sea which it had perturbed into new paths of luminous beauty.

And I thought!:

"The banging of the window has awakened Marion."

It thrilled me to think that within that form, recondite, uncanny as a wraith is uncanny to the mortal sense, was concealed the earthly body of Marion, with its gross flesh, its clothes, the spectacles in the pocket of the apron. And I could not see it. It was hidden from me behind the dazzling veil of more subtle phenomena. I say this thrilled me.

I thought:

"Was that her soul, which fled and returned?"

I had imagined the soul in my earthly life, so far as I had troubled myself with the impossible task of imagining it, as—as what? As a flame, or something in the form of a flame; some wisp of divine vapour insecurely imprisoned in my head. But now I saw that the earthly body of Marion, instead of containing an ethereal counterpart, was contained in an ethereal counterpart. I knew, rather than saw, that I, too, was a form resembling the ethereal form of Marion. Was this the soul? Could it be

the soul? If so, what divine particle had remained in the earthly body of Marion to keep it in pulsation during the eager soul's clandestine desertion? Marion had relinquished her earthly body, and her body slept. I had relinquished my earthly body—and I was dead, as 'they' called it. Wherein lay the difference between our cases?

Child! I was yet an infant, with the inconvenience of being aware of it.

The brilliant form of Marion fascinated me, the child! It also was full of vibrations, currents, and shimmerings; more complex and puzzling than those of the fluid in which it floated at rest. I say 'at rest'; but even its outline was never still, waving elastically from head to foot in scarce-perceptible undulations. Every part of it modified itself continuously, carrying on a ceaseless special activity while consenting to the ceaseless change. The whole was a miracle of adaptability… Indescribable! Yes, though in my earthly life I would have been ashamed to write that word! … Imagine a watch. Imagine the complexity of a watch multiplied a thousandfold! Imagine it undulating in exquisite curves while still functioning with absolute exactitude! Imagine it all chromatically luminiferous! That is the gross and clumsy best I can do to defeat the indescribability of that form.

When Marion had served me at dinner, it was that wondrous, waving, lucent form that had bowed toward me. When she would presently offer to my wife the restoring tea, that dazzling form would miraculously undulate behind the tray, and another, its peer in ineffable beauty, would bend over the earthen cup!… Blind!…

A vague shape swam irresolutely downward, from above or behind my head, hung, and dissolved gradually.

Then recommenced the emanation of clearly-defined floating shapes from the head of the ethereal counterpart of Marion. They detached themselves, one after another, in the manner of bubbles, and flowed away in a procession, as different as individuals and as similar as Chinamen. I brought together all my childish faculties to study their birth. Their inception was indubitably to be seen in a whorl or volution of the omnipresent fluid, drawn into the form of Marion, matured there, and then expelled. The movements and modifications were so rapid and so confusing that I could determine no more than this. But as each shape floated off from the creative form, I perceived that the operations of the

force which had moulded it had also had their effect on the creative form itself, and that the general result was structural cellular change. And while I marvelled I knew that I should rightly have marvelled more had it been otherwise.

And this was my first dim view of the physical aspect of thought. Only a little while, and I had by an old instinct sought to confine the attribute 'physical' to the earthly world. I had had to force myself to apply it to this other world. But now I understood that this other world was far more intimately and visibly physical than the earthly. In the earthly, one timorously postulated the physical basis of thought; in this other it was patent. And I saw that words were a device invented by the earthly world to lessen the inconveniences caused by its insensibility to all but the grossest physical phenomena. The earthly world was responsive to nothing finer than air; hence it employed the vibrations of air to remedy the tremendous defects of its eyesight.

Now I noticed that two plainly distinct species of thought-shapes were being thrown off from Marion's form. One was violet coloured, the other a delicate rose. Sometimes there would be a long succession of the violet, then of the rose; then they would alternate evenly. And then, as I watched, I could trace a third stream of almost crude vermilion shapes darting forth in a direction different from that of the other two. The vermilion shapes alarmed me, and even the beauty of the violet shapes, as I studied them, inspired me with a certain antipathy. And, time passing and my vision improving, I could discern that the effects, on the woman's ethereal organism, of these three different series of acts of thought, were markedly dissimilar. Their dissimilarity soon so impressed me that I wondered I had observed anything else.

I followed the irregular streams of vermilion shapes. By an effort of concentration I could follow their absorbed and as it were angry flight through the endless living luminance. And I found that their objective was the form of another woman, brighter even than Marion's. The form was in an upright attitude, nearly still. Its earthly counterpart was not therefore asleep. I sought intensely to distinguish the earthly counterpart and could not. Then I saw a number of less dazzling forms, horizontally disposed, in rows; and I reflected upon hospitals, barracks, hotels. But the horizontal forms were all forms of women. What could be the earthly solution?

The vermilion shapes that had so resolutely and inexorably voyaged under Marion's impulse to the vigil-keeping woman assaulted with extraordinary obstinacy the radiant form of the latter. It was as though they had been endowed with an energy, a hatred of their own; it was as if they lived with a vitality of their own. And their legion increased; sometimes they completely enveloped the radiant form as in a vast menace. And then—another discovery in the exquisite drama—I traced an emanation of thought-shapes from the dazzling, whirling brain that the vermilions were attacking. I had overlooked them at first, with my infantile careless organs, owing to the extreme, pure delicacy of their rosy tints. But having secured my attention they held it by the esoteric quality of their shy beauty. I followed them, in their turn, leaving the radiant form enmeshed in inimical vermilions. Their goal was the male form which I had previously learned to be the goal of Marion's thoughts before she slept, and which I surely guessed the ethereal part of her had visited during her dream. I could no longer see the trestle bed, nor any trace of the earthly man. I settled for myself his identity chiefly by recognising the unmistakable stream of violet and rosy shapes which Marion was still directing upon him.

To me, the naive child, it was a stupendous spectacle, a spectacle overwhelming in awe and beauty—this soft besieging, this importunity or invocation of the unconscious male form by the double and the single streams of thoughts impelled by the two women distant from him and from each other! The powerful latent elegance of the transparent and glittering form, reposing inactive yet the theatre of innumerable vital currents and vibrations that showed themselves in shifting brightness; and round about it the dazzling play and interplay of the small appealing lucent shapes, each influential with its special energy! The simplicity of the child in me at once grasped the significance of the different colorations. The violet were the vehicles of desire, and the rose were the messengers of unselfish affection. No two shapes were alike in tint or in outline. There were endless shades of rose; the tenderer came from the unknown woman, whose emissaries never wore the formidable violet hue. The vermilions passing from Marion to the unknown woman were the shapes of jealous hatred.

I remembered, suddenly, having heard that the fair young man who was employed about the exterior of Palace Court Mansions had

previously served in some outdoor capacity at a prison for women-convicts. I was assisting at the struggle between a parlour maid and a female warder for the heart of an odd-job-man. Only I was a witness of that aspect of it which was too radiant for the earthly eye to see; the fine physical basis of it all, beyond the planes of earthly vision.

And I thought:

"If the hidden activity of such souls is so entrancingly resplendent, what must be the hidden activity of more advanced beings?" And again: "Perhaps, nay, certainly, I have not seen all, even of these three. Beyond what I have seen there may be—there are—phenomena still more amazing in beauty."

In the hasty insolence of a suddenly acquired knowledge I had but a few moments ago called the earthly race a race of porters and navvies. Now I knew that a complete physical vision of even a porter or a navvy would dazzle my sight and my intellect, newly enlarged, of which I had been so proud. I humbled myself joyously in wonder. The solemn thing was that 'they' themselves lived in ignorance of their own splendour, and of the fineness of their organism, and of the reach of their faculties. Their magnificence was veiled from them. They existed in easy mastery amidst miracles, doing miracles,—and never suspected. They did not suspect the hundredth part of the powers which they possessed and constantly exercised. They were but awaking from unconsciousness into consciousness. They worked in the thick gloom of instinct, not knowing when they did good for themselves and when evil. They were building the future with terrific tools, and guessed not.

As, my searching eyes returning to their original objective, I watched the prismatic form of Marion, with the head on one side, creating and dispatching thought-shapes amidst that sea of fluid light, I could not help marvelling at the chasm between the self of which she was conscious and the self of which she was unconscious. Since I could not see the earthly view of Marion, my fancy pictured it. She reclined in the easy-chair, her tousled head against one of the ear-flaps, and those grotesque spectacles in one of the pockets of her apron. Commanded to relate sincerely what experiences she had passed through, she would have replied that she had gone into the study of her late master to rest, had thought considerably about a man whom she loved, had fallen asleep and dreamed of him, had been awakened by a noise, and had

continued to think about her lover, with a certain preoccupation concerning another woman whom she knew to be interested in him. And she would have supposed herself to be precisely the same Marion as had sat down in the chair. That was all. She could not have even the dimmest surmise that she possessed a body compact of light, that she had fabricated volitional shapes and sent them, charged with her vital energy, infallibly to fixed destinations, that she had physically and eternally influenced other beings at a distance, that the radiant physical part of her had visited her lover where he lay, and finally that she was ceaselessly modifying her own organism and so deciding the tendencies of her future.

I gazed at the lambent brilliance of the form, coruscating those chromatic shapes. And I was aware of pity for her. I wanted somehow to warn her of the grave and lasting import of her apparently trifling activities. I wanted to protect her from the tremendous perils of her own ignorance of herself. And instantly I saw, wending from my form to hers, a series of pale rose shapes, as lovely in their clear and intricate outlines as in the delicacy of their tints. Previously, I had emanated none but grey or bluish shapes, inchoate or vague, and without defined direction. These new shapes followed one another purposefully in a waving stream and surrounded gently the ethereal form of Marion, touching it in soft contacts and pressures, and being perhaps infinitesimally absorbed into it. I stood afraid of my own powers. Soon afterwards, other shapes, and harsher, visited her, and then her bright form moved gliding away.

Had I sufficiently willed I might have followed it. But I did not.

I was intoxicated by knowledge, and the thirst for knowledge seized me with such violence that I seemed to sink into a kind of inanition. "More knowledge! A deeper penetration of the mystery! In that alone lies happiness!" Such were my expiring thoughts.

Chapter XX: The Cost of Grief

I grew conscious of external vibrations which were setting up vibrations within myself. I struggled instinctively against this disturbance, as one in heavy sleep instinctively seeks to repel the influence which would wake him. But I did not succeed. My perceptive faculties became unwillingly but acutely active. I was still in the bright living atmosphere of innumerable currents and ever-changing hues. And my form was

surrounded by thought-shapes transparent and prismatic. I saw now that immense multitudes of these shapes surged everywhere in the atmosphere, but that most of them were so tenuous and slight as to be scarcely visible. To distinguish them from the medium in which they moved needed practice. Of the shapes specially surrounding myself none save two species produced any effect on me whatever. But those two species did assuredly affect me, causing modifications of my substance. And then I understood, wondering why I had not understood before, that they, like all the rest, were in rapid vibration and that their power over myself depended on the correspondence of their vibrations with certain of my own. And I saw how crude and infantile was my original idea that the thought-shapes acted on the bright forms of individuals by being absorbed into them.

These two streams of thought were, as I felt instantly, the messengers of Inez and perhaps Marion, seeking to draw me again to the earthly plane. They wanted me; they longed for me; they grieved piteously at my departure, and would have it cancelled, undone; they wished time itself to roll back. Perhaps they were together now, those two, weeping quietly —Marion weeping respectfully. Little they guessed that they were enveloped in light and that their thoughts, urged by the intensity of their desires, were shooting forth in coruscating torrents to lure me whence I had come. The shapes, continuously arriving, were surpassingly beautiful to the sight; one stream was outrageously beautiful—there is no other phrase for it. But with that hysteric violence I sought to shake them off, to nullify by mere volition the strange force of their influence over me!

I saw with painful alarm an impending tragedy, myself the victim and those two women the ignorant cause of it. They could only attract me near themselves, to leave me beating once more in vain against the shut gates of humanity. They could never see me. I could never join them. Their grief—and especially the savage, remorseful grief of Inez—meant nothing but disaster for me, torture, futility, a desolating break in my evolution!

Was it possible that Inez did not guess? Was it possible that she was blind to the callous, indifferent selfishness of her grief—that grief in which she certainly took pride?

Yes, it was possible; it was sure. The crime against me was due to naught but lack of reflection. If Inez had reflected an instant she must have seen that to wish me back was to wish me evil, pain, danger, and retrogression. But she considered only the smart of her own sorrow; at any cost she would heal that! I, too, in my time, had been as she was.

I longed passionately to go forward. Knowledge, more and stranger knowledge, was calling me on. I was awake again to the divine thirst. But these untowardly beautiful visitants, with their soft urgency, drew me to retreat.

Already in patches, and momentarily, the earthly world broke through the lucent plane, coarsely islanding the sea of radiance with fragments of the existence which I had left. Sometimes I could see a whole room, a whole street, clouds, a steeple—apparent and then gone. All was unfamiliar, unrecognisable. Probably I should have discovered myself in my own home, had I not struggled fiercely against any such destination. I was like a ship that, determined not to fly before the wind, slides across it at an angle, subject to it but defying it. I saw multitudes of radiant forms sweeping along together in the sea of light, and then solitary ones, and then more, travelling in an opposite direction. I saw groups of radiant animals. I saw mysterious radiant creatures resembling nothing in my experience, engaged intensely in activities as mysterious as themselves. All these waving in the far-stretching, vibrant translucency cloven by sudden irruptions of gross earthly phenomena! I was dazed.

Then the translucency grew more sombre; of a darker glow and flush. And I saw hundreds of male forms on the same plane as myself, but less lustrous than any I had yet encountered, crowding toward one spot. And as the atmosphere in which they waved became more lucid, I distinguished the roofs and towers of a public square intruding in it, and particularly a building that glared with coloured earthly lights. The waving forms of my fellows besieged this building; some floated hesitant at the doors, others swept ethereally through its coarse earthly walls into the interior. It was a fashionable music hall, the Ottoman, to which John Hulse had several times taken me. I could see simultaneously the exterior and the interior, with its horseshoe shape and its three garish promenades one above another, and the stage like a box with one side removed. It was crammed with earthly beings of both sexes, either intent

upon the transactions of the stage or eyeing each other as they walked to and fro in the promenades. A strange, ridiculous spectacle! And all bathed, interpenetrated by the darkly luminiferous sea in which waved I and my fellows! Mournful confusion of two planes! A grievous band, my fellows,—sinister, anxious, unhappy, agog, lickerish. See the timid regiment that dared not or could not enter! See their set eyes! And see those within, waving and wending, dully chromatic, among the promenading women whose gaudy clothes were obscured by the luminosity, which emanated from each of them. Unconscious music-hall! Conflict and altercation of lights, planes, and existences! Could they have surmised, those earthly ones; could they have truly glimpsed their visitants or even themselves—what a scene of terror!… The earthly lights began to fade, the earthly beings poured out, stampeding into the open square, and so separated into groups and units. And my fellows turned disappointed and unsatisfied away. But some could not leave the building; they waved within it or without it, held perhaps by forces which they themselves had unwittingly created.

I slanted onward, cheerless and chagrined, but feeling less and less the magnetic influence of those beautiful thought-shapes which were, however, still following me from Inez. And after other similar and possibly stranger spectacles than that of the square, I seemed to quit entirely the range of earthliness, and I was once more in the radiant and thrilled atmosphere of moving colour unstained by any gross invasion. My mood lightened as I voyaged. And at length I perceived that this ocean was a solitude for me. I alone deflected its multitudinous currents. No thought shapes even wandered through it, save a few that still obstinately but faintly pursued myself.

And then I descried a brighter luminance. And I approached it, nearer and nearer; until, compared to its splendour, the splendour of the ambient atmosphere was darkness. And amidst the glittering rays which darted around the luminance, my dazzled eyes seemed to distinguish a form of pure light. I trembled. Dread was upon me. I wanted to draw still nearer. But I dared not. My pride refused me. I feared, not for my safety, but lest I might encounter a greater than I. Cowardice! Always I had declined to bow to the conception of a spiritual superior. I turned and fled. Yes, it was a flight. Not a single thought-shape now dogged me. I was solitary.

Chapter XXI: Freedom

Conceive the luminous air, less agitated here by currents, but still flashing and sparkling in delicate hues, strange even to my now-accustomed eyes. I have called it a sea, in my forlorn attempts after the impossible adequacy of description. Dismiss any idea of humidity, of resistance, of embarrassment, of unusualness. I existed in an element that was my element, as proper and as necessary to me as earthly air once. That I should live in diffused light, in a visible atmosphere, in an environment of transparencies, seemed absolutely natural to me. I say this lest I should have inadvertently led you to conceive me as miraculously swimming through miraculous wet waves, or moving half-blinded amidst the coloured fumes of unimagined fires. I was at home.

Save myself and this encircling air, the sole phenomena were the vague thought-shapes which constantly emanated from me, floating idle near for a time and then vanishing.

I was alone. Before my death, my greatest pleasure had been in reflection. The habit of reflection was assuredly dearer to me than no matter what companionship; and I would not have sacrificed it to gain any reputation whatever. Yet if it had been remarked to me, before my death: "You are happiest when you withdraw within yourself," I should have sincerely denied the assertion. I now perceived how true it would have been. With what a feeling of almost ecstatic joy and freedom I used to plunge into the streets in order to muse at my ease! With what deep satisfaction I savoured my contemplations, even when they were gloomy, as ordinarily they were. A futile self-indulgence!

In this life- and light-bestowing atmosphere, with a mental apparatus incomparably less defective than that other, I mused for an eternity, amidst conditions of unexampled freedom, except the liberty to encounter other phenomena. And I said to myself:

"Should this be likened to heaven or to hell?"

And I replied:

"To both." It was neither distinctly a reward nor distinctly a punishment (for a punishment is also a reward), but a consequence, a sequel.

I had no sense of time nor of change. There was no morning, no night. Nor did I desire these external accidents. I was set and fixed in a calm, omnipresent, vacuous beauty, inviolate.

Chapter XXII: The Woman

A desire awakened in me for companionship. It waxed, became definite and precise. For a space I had the sensation of being no longer alone, but my eyes could not confirm the sensation. There, near me, without surprise, but with rapture, I saw a woman. She was more radiant than any radiant creature I had yet seen, save the one from whose light I had retreated, and whom indeed I could not be said to have veritably seen. She was the acme of the beautiful in my experience; in face, in figure, and in grace. She saw me without surprise, but with rapture.

I shared eternity with this woman.

We passed through an existence on a level of noble simplicity not to be conceived on the earthly plane,—noble in its passion, in its repose, in all its intercourse, mental and emotional. We were never, as the phrase is, 'brought to earth' by the pettiness of life. The conditions of our life eliminated any pettiness. Even our bodies did not weigh upon us, obstinate in their grossness. Our relations were purified by the complete absence of apprehension, serious or trifling. We did not fear the morrow, nor the fragility of the physical frame, nor penury, nor death, nor the soul's capriciousness, nor the wound of an ugly vision, nor the incursion of another's grief into our bliss. Our life together was the essence of life, classically purged of the extrinsic; it was raised to the elemental.

We had not even names.

She combined in her nature all fine qualities, even the most opposite. She was the very spirit of grace; never did she lapse from grace. All the physical manifestations of her were lovely. She was more feminine than any being of her sex that I had ever seen. She was yielding; she was acquiescent; she was the embodiment of surrender. Yet when she had given all, she had more to give, and after every sort of compliance her own powerful individuality remained intact. She reflected, but was not a glass. Her receptivity exalted me, but did not lower herself. She was always ready to mould her mood to mine; but when I wished to mould mine to hers, she had sufficient force to make the freak a valuable experience. She had the perfect modesty of utter shamelessness. She reconciled dignity with capriciousness, and capriciousness with reason. She was both intuitive and rational. She never argued like a woman except in circumstances when the result would be creditable to each of us. She never sheltered herself, against me, behind her womanhood. She

had, to a degree that did not cease to be astounding, the skill to preserve my self-respect and her own and my respect for her: feat of supreme difficulty; feat also necessary to a perfect relationship! She soothed without enervating. She stimulated without fatiguing. She was constant without monotony. She was faultless without being tedious.

And she had a glance....

Before my death I had impatiently demanded, in the excess of my fastidiousness, why all women could not be rolled into one woman for the companionship of a man. I had envisaged such an all-comprehensive woman as an impossible ideal. Here it was realised. Here it was much more than realised, for she had every fine quality in greater profusion than I had met any single fine quality in any woman before. As an instrument of every noble pleasure, she exceeded the dream as the dream exceeded the previous reality. She was mine. She was my complement; but I was under no obligation to be hers. Her destiny was to complete mine. She was happy in it. She asked no more. With all her glorious faculties and charms, she was joyously content to subserve my end. It was the most sublime flattery that could be conceived.

"Is it heaven or hell?" I asked myself, in the midst of eternity.

And after an eternal pause, I replied:

"Both."

I thus lived between meditation and the woman, wrapped in beauty.

Whether she knew that I was in heaven and in hell I could not guess. Though her very soul seemed to have the transparency of crystal, I could not guess. This was the unique insoluble enigma that the wondrous creature offered to my intelligence.

Chapter XXIII: The Palace

It was she who descried the palace. I call it a palace, not because it was immense and gorgeous, but because of its impressive dignity and stateliness. It rose, secure upon no foundations, aloft in the luminiferous ether, glittering prismatically as everything glittered, somewhat brighter than the pulsating air, rather less bright than ourselves. It so nearly matched the air in hues and radiance, that at first I could scarcely distinguish the form of its architecture; it was like an edifice of pearl seen faintly in a sun-steeped mist. It seemed unreal. But it was real

enough. Presently I could decipher its dome, its slender pillars masking its walls, its cornices, and its inviting portal. It had no windows.

On the radiant plane it was the only object I had met whose outlines did not continuously wave. It existed rigid as a whole, but within the undeflected outlines, a slight vibration of the material itself could be observed.

I entered alone. And when I beheld its interior I exclaimed softly to myself:

"Of course!"

It was a library. I was a bookman; I had always been a bookman. From adolescence books had been one of my passions. Books not merely—and perhaps not chiefly—as vehicles of learning or knowledge, but books as books, books as entities, books as beautiful things, books as historical antiquities, books as repositories of memorable associations. Questions of type, ink, paper, margins, watermarks, paginations, bindings, were capable of really agitating me. I was too sensitive and catholic a lover of books to be a scholar in the strict modern meaning of the term. My magnum opus was not a work of scholarship, and even such scholarship as it comprised had been attained by a labour hateful to me. I would inhale the scholarship of others as a sweet smell; I would gather it like honey, but eclectically, never exhausting one flower before trying the next. My knowledge was, perhaps, considerable, but it was unorganised. And my principal claim to consideration was that I could wander in any demesne of culture without having the awkward air of a stranger. In brief, I was comprehensively bookish.

I had dreamed of libraries, as every bookman has dreamed of libraries. This one did not correspond with my dream, because it went beyond my dream in every particular. I could see that at a glance, by the look of the volumes, by the disposition of the volumes, and by the machinery of research. No book in any noble library is so interesting, so revealing, as the catalogue of it. Every bookman has discovered this truth for himself. The catalogue of this library was ranged on a series of low shelves under the dome. The catalogue of this library was more finely printed, and more superbly bound than any book that I had ever seen. Each quarto volume was an individual triumph of typography. The setting of the page— desperate problem in catalogue or dictionary—

was a masterpiece of technical ingenuity. Not till my nostrils had quivered to these delights, did I turn to the plan of the catalogue, with its system of two simultaneous alphabets, so intricate and yet so effectively simple. The catalogue in an instant of time told me more of the library than I could easily believe.

Lying open on the desk above the rows of the catalogue was a folio, open: Henry Stephen's edition of Herodotus, familiar to amateurs of impartial taste as one of the most beautiful books existing in the Greek character. But not such an example of the treasure as I had seen! An example transmuted into the very divinity of bibliophily! Radiant, light-giving, immaculate! To touch it was to thrill. And every book, in its degree, was thus consummated into the transcendent.

I began to use the library. I said to myself: "This alone lacked." And I knew how to use it. I was worthy of it. It was an instrument which I could employ without degrading it. My assimilative powers astonished me, though I knew that they were tremendously enriched. The rapidity with which I could seize the principles of an unknown language was specially exciting.

In the library I spent an eternity, making contacts with all cultures, and acquiring an erudition that by the standard of an earthly plane would be deemed immeasurable. But I never exhausted the library. I never even approached its confines. I never saw the beginning of the end of it. And I was free. I read where I pleased; I went deep where I pleased; I was superficial where I pleased. I had no task, no obligation, no finite goal. My one aim was to procure pleasure in absorbing that which was delicate, refined, humane, curious, distinguished, in the emotional and learned literature of the centuries. I was the supreme dilettante. I had always longed to carry the cult of belles-lettres to unprecedented heights. Now I accomplished what I had wished to accomplish, and tenfold what I had wished to accomplish, amidst conditions that fulfilled the ideal. For not merely was this ardour of self-perfection unattended by any personal inconveniences, but it involved the neglect of no duty.

The woman was happy in my absorption, and she was happy when I drew out of it and lost myself in her. Part of her destiny was to be solitary when I had no need of her, and the weaving of one part of her destiny was no more precious to her than the weaving of another. It was

inconceivable that her glance should reproach me, or that I could be guilty toward her. Such was our relation that my every act, because it was my act, was best for her.

And still I asked myself:

"Is it heaven or hell?"

And I replied:

"It is both."

I began, in the midst of delicious and calm eternities of perfect realisation to be ever so dimly aware within me of disturbing intuitions. They shot through me, were gone, and were forgotten. They returned, and I remembered the forgotten flash of them.

Chapter XXIV: Culmination

I thus lived with my thoughts and with the woman, in and out of the palace of literatures, that rested firm and lovely for ever on no foundation amidst the luminiferous air. I was continually discovering new pleasures within the palace, and yet nothing that I discovered could surprise me; not even the pictures and sculptures which abounded in quiet aisles of it, and whose tremendous power and beauty were even less susceptible of adequate description than the library itself. I could not exist in the palace without being the constant and thrilled object of the most lofty and delicate influences of art.

Then I found a new doorway at the extremity of the palace, and, looking from it, I saw, in the universal radiance, distant landscapes and seas. Never since my death, till then, had I seen a landscape. These were the majestic, absolute perfecting of earthly landscapes—purified of the accidental. I can only liken them, clumsily, to the landscapes of the greatest Japanese paintings, vast, simple, overwhelming in the severe sobriety of their beauty. Mountains; valleys; rivers that wound in expressive and faultless curves to solemn oceans; and the line of coasts. All more radiant than the radiant air! All transparently gleaming in a consonance of hues without a name! All bathed in the speechless calm of eternity!

What an ennobling and fresh impulse to the thoughts!

And, nearer, were immense gardens, strictly formalised: avenues, alleys, borders, fountains, trained trees, geometric spaces, canals, patterns of flowers, statuary, pergolas. And the chief avenue ran,

widening out of the long perspective, right up to the doorway at which I stood. It was all mine. And with the woman I would wander in it, enfranchised from every care and preoccupation. Ideal nature in the distance; nature subjugated by ideal art around us, and fine art itself in the palace! No time; no task! Freedom and eternity!

Then I came to the first of the pavilions of music, in which orchestras and smaller groups played the most sublime and the most accomplished of all the music that was known to me, and many compositions which were unfamiliar and which left me the ecstatic and silent victim of their power. In all this music the exquisite quality of the tone itself was what first amazed me; the basic material out of which beauty was fashioned was itself surpassingly beautiful. I had not heard such instruments, nor such technique.... Nor can I describe this music. And yet, I could have described it then. It was in connection with this music that I first had intercourse with beings other than the woman on my own plane. The musicians themselves were hedged away from me by the peculiar construction of the pavilions. But there were other listening wanderers in the gardens. And they were ready to converse; we conversed with familiar ease, unastonished at the encounter, unharassed by any curiosity concerning each other, demanding and expecting nothing from each other but subtlety, justness, and clarity in our critical and comparative appreciations of that which we heard. I was indeed among equals; safe from the horrid jar of ignorance, violence, or prejudice. These exchanges of opinion, these confessions of emotional experience, filled in the most delicious manner the pauses of the music. As soon as the mood dictated I departed from the garden, quitting the other dilettanti without any regret but with the pleasurable anticipation of meeting them again. From the doorway I would watch for a moment the beautiful attitudes assumed by their iridescent forms under the waving trees. I had no wish for closer intimacy with them. That earthly longing to tear the veil from the secrets of personality seemed somewhat infantile to me, if not vulgar. The profound intimacy of my one companion sufficed. I savoured the society of the inhabitants of the garden; I had fervent joy in my one companion; but my delight in loneliness never lessened.

In my loneliness I would reflect upon the strange sequence of my history. I saw that the supreme experience of the music had been

reserved for me. I understood the logical order of the phases. I marvelled that until each experience came I should not have felt the lack of it. I, whose concern had been supereminently with music, had not consciously desired music till I heard its sound. Desire and the satisfaction of desire had been simultaneous.

Enveloped in eternity I lived amid universal nature, and amid music, and amid the influences of the other arts, tasting erudition, smoothly consorting with equal individualities, losing myself awhile in radiant space with my one perfect companion, and at moments withdrawing into absolute solitude that I might know what I was. The existence was like a dream; but it was not a dream. It had the magic and incredible idealism of a dream; but it was not a dream. It was a physical reality—visible, audible, tangible. It lacked naught. Not even was it flawed by dark tints of regret for those familiarities and those faces which I had left behind on the other side of death. No! The tie with that other plane seemed to be definitely snapped. I had no sorrow.

And still, I asked myself:

"Is this heaven or hell?"

And the answer was the same as it had always been.

And those disturbing intuitions revisited me with their lancinating flash, frequently and more frequently: forgotten, and insistently recalling themselves to my memory, made forgetful by the perfection of conceivable happiness.

Chapter XXV: The Death of Desire

At a certain moment, after an unusually long period of solitary reflection, I became aware of the possession of a definite and paramount idea. And I saw its shape, differing utterly from any other shape. I saw it and felt it suddenly, but the time of its gestation within me must have been immense. It was the fruit of all those persistent and similar strokes of intuition. Revolutionary, fatal, and final in character, it nevertheless neither startled nor intimidated me. I beheld it calmly, as though I had been acquainted with it from everlasting. It was: that I had been, and was still, living in hell. (I perhaps need not say that I use the word 'hell' for its large associational convenience, trusting that it may be aptly interpreted.) My lot did not partake of the nature of heaven.

Every fine and beautiful desire which had constantly and genuinely actuated me in that other and ended existence, had in this existence been realised to a degree transcendental and previously unimaginable. Every such desire had even been purged of what was mean and accidental in it, and had passed into consummation in the purest essential form, free from all trace of trivial or base admixtures. My plan for the extension and completion of my egoism had been impeccably executed, either by me or for me.

Eternity lapsed onward in the midst of universal radiance,—and I was in hell. The foundation of my consciousness was an affliction so intense that during an eternity I had generally accepted it for a bliss equally intense. (And indeed it is within the experience of everyone that when pleasure and pain reach a certain intensity they are indistinguishable). But now I had reached the stage of clear vision. Strange that one can inhabit hell without the sure conviction of being there!

And another epochal idea was born in me, equally definite, less fundamental, but distressing. I myself had created those instruments to the realisation of desire. The woman, the palace, the literatures, the works of art, the garden, the music, the musicians, the elegant dilettanti, the formidable and lovely landscapes—I had created them all. Incomparably marvellous as they were, they were yet the toys which the spiritual child in me had created for his diversion out of the all-permeating ethereal essence in which I existed. Or, if I was not the creator, I was the cause of the creative acts. The creative acts had been performed at my will. The order of the universe was such that terrific energies of creation were in subjection to my impulses. I had dreamed—yes, I will admit now what previously I had denied—I had dreamed; but here one could not dream without creating realities. The elastic responsiveness of matter was so sensitive that vision and physical fact were one.

Even the woman I had created. She was supernal, but she was only the blossom of my desire; she was only an ineffable extension of my egoism.

I say that this knowledge distressed me. It was humiliating, more humiliating than any other experience in my memory. And the whole of my sublime creation gradually descended in my esteem till it

appeared —no, not tawdry, though I was about to use the word—but negligible! Exquisitely and painfully negligible! An infant's plaything!

And yet it constituted a fabulously prodigious array, there behind me on the borders of my solitude. As I passed it mentally in review, I thrilled in retrospect, as one thrills after a wonder or a danger which one appreciates only when it is over. The sense of the creative power of thought wrapped me in disconcerting folds of the uncanny. That woman!... What would thought not do, impelled by desire? How did I stand, the creator, towards her, the created? Could I dissolve her back into the essence, resuming the energy which I had breathed into her? Had I the right to do so? This that I had committed was the most mysterious and awful of sins. I dared not emerge from my solitude, and, returning to the loveliness which my desire had brought into existence, look it in the face! No remorse could redeem what I had done! Nevertheless, a force that sprang from the soul of my soul compelled me, all shrinking and reluctant, to revisit my vast exploit.

It was fading. My palace, still complete in every outline, scarcely affected the sight. It was like air against radiant air, dimly gleaming; melting like the dream it was. I walked through it as through the portalled fabric of a luminous cloud. And its treasures lay serried within it, faint in dissolution. The great gardens were as gardens moulded in vapour, and their pathways nothing but beams of some pale effluence. And I could see the forms of the amiable and cultured dilettanti grouped together in the final attitudes of prostration; and over them the drooping trees. And my affrighted ear caught the thin desolate piping of music expiring in an anguish of beauty; while a faint refulgence on the farthest horizons showed where the majesty of my seas and mountains was dying.

Yes, she, too, was there. Her bright ebbing was the longest....

At last I was alone in the infinite vibrating atmosphere from which the miracle of my creative dream had been drawn, and into which it had again resolved. And then I felt that dissolution awaited me also. And I perceived with the suddenness of a revelation that I had not yet died. I had not, as I thought, been through death. That trifling mutation which sloughs the earthly flesh was not death. It was but the first portico, the preliminary warning of the real death. The real death meant the end of desire, and it now approached. I yearned for it. It was the last of my

desires; it was the desire which closed desire. In my increasing lassitude and loss of strength, I spent tremendous force in urging myself into that real death, so that I might know what was beyond it. The possession of such knowledge seemed to be a consideration dwarfing all others into nullity.

And it was as if I cast off garment after garment of radiance; and I could see these abandoned shells floating weakly around me in the light. And then there visited me a beatific ministration—thought-shapes that had travelled through immeasurable void to soothe me into unconsciousness. They were the thoughts of Inez. She was praying for the welfare of my soul.

Chapter XXVI: Birth

Death is an awakening.

Familiar and ancient phrase! A survival from the wreck of creeds. One had ceased to regard it as possessing an instant significance. One had classed it with the pathetic refuse amid which it lay. A corpse from which the soul of meaning had escaped! And yet—it is astonishing and portentous how the immortal spark will leap out of the white ashes, and burn and blind! The deep truth of the phrase burst upon me in a tremendous disclosure. The phrase had been debased in the mouths of fanatics, hypocrites, devotees, and hysterics for thousands of years; and it came to me fresh, virgin, and exquisitely apposite. I awoke. I knew what it was to quicken. I knew what it was to emerge from stupor, dream, nightmares, and illusion into reality and activity. I had the poignant sense of life. And I viewed all that out of which I had awakened with a pitiful surprise, not violent but gentle. It was without importance, since it was over; but, nevertheless, there was something wondrous, something that strangely touched me, in the simple fact that through all that heavy and agitated sleep, sleep which had never lightened beyond a drowsiness haunted by hallucinations, I had not once guessed that I was not awake, that I was not truly born. And all the past, from its dim beginnings on the plane of earth to the last flicker of consciousness in the death of my desires, receded whole, swung backward into the infinitely remote, and became history.

The limits of honest description are now being reached. I was in life. I knew the real. But I can not convey the impression of it. No feeling of

awe, no hesitation about unveiling the esoteric, prevents me, but simply the fundamental impossibility of the feat. All the standards of comparison are now too weakened.

I had, even in my stupor, moved amid light, chromatic, prismatic, amidst transparencies and dazzling beauties. I had already, even in the progressive evolution of my dreams and illusions, enjoyed miraculous powers and sensations, penetrating apparently to the farthest verge of physical capacities. My nightmares had closed in perceptions and knowledge that earlier would have seemed incredible of achievement.... All that—in the adequate relation of which I have already failed, and must have failed, even with a glittering mosaic of superlatives—all that was nothing! All that was dull, heavy, dingy, leaden, inert, lifeless.

Imagine intensity....

See! Imagine the central living fires of a furnace, white-glowing (or what you call white, for it is utterly different from the white of snow), shades of light passing over them and through them, wavering hues of no colour! Imagine the depths of that terrific vitality, upon which your eye dare not rest; upon which even your imagination dare not rest for long, lest the thrill should frighten you! Imagine this intensity, and this light that varies yet is without colour! But use your imagination with skill and mastery. Let it separate the blasting destructiveness of heat from this light and this intensity....

The brain must accustom itself. A world of light and intensity....

A world not of colour.

With that, a world of lightness! Not immaterial, because that which is immaterial cannot be conceived. But matter refined to a tenuity far surpassing the ethereality of the plane from which I had awakened. And yet broadly divisible into the three degrees. And exceedingly complex in its organisation; functioning in ten thousand novel ways; expending energy as it were in an ecstatic intoxication of irrepressible vitality.... Pulsating with currents of vibration that flashed through, modifying themselves innumerable times in a moment! A world of instant responsiveness, of answer darting to impulse with the speed of perfect sensibility.... A-throb!

Beings, like myself, in this intense environment, centres of still more intense vitality; unnumbered! A few outshining the rest in the brightness of their intensity and the bewildering manifestations of their

life. And here and there, scarcely discernible in glory, greater beings, beings whose glory itself veiled them, and who freely passed into and from a vast indistinguishable, radiating nucleus of force and light which their lesser companions seldom approached. In my sleep I had seen one such greater being and had fled in illusory fear, fear from which now I was delivered.

This immeasurable universe of beings was in the eternal and blissful throe of intense intercommunication! What actuated it, what threw it into its fervour of life, was a sort of sublime frenzy of urgent mutual sympathy. The intercommunication was immediate, the exchange of thought instantaneous in this environment of absolute responsiveness. It went on incessantly, universally, and with an ultimate vehemence. It was an everlasting effervescence and ebullition.... Imagine the sentient atoms of some ineffable whole, separated through æons, and then rejoining, yearning in an endless spasm toward a supreme coalescence.... At moments it seemed as if the coalescence was accomplished. Beings and environment seemed to merge into an invisible unity.... Then the atoms would break apart and resolve again, and the vehicle in which they moved would whitely glisten once more with those lovely geometric figures that were apparently their abstract conceptions, static.

Imagine the solemn calm of this intense life, if you can....

And I! What and how was I, atom in this concourse? When the swimmer unclothes, and abandons himself to the water, naked, letting the water caress the whole of his nakedness, moving his limbs in voluptuous ease untrammelled by even the lightest garment, then, as never under other conditions, he is aware of his body; and perhaps the thought occurs to him that to live otherwise than in that naked freedom is not to live.... So was I aware for the first time of my body, elastic, responsive, and free. So I had at last cast off the hard, stiff, encumbering cases which in my visions of delusion I had accepted for my body. Astounding that even in a stupor of the senses I could have supposed that those gross, unresponsive envelopes were my body! Astounding that the spark of life should have survived those stifling imprisonments.... Now I had a vivid joy in my body, whose form, in its eternal changefulness, maintained a constant surprise of pure beauty. Its plasticity under the function of thought was an ever-renewed miracle of curves. It was the creature and the illustration of my thought and of the

thoughts which impinged on it. It thrilled from moment to moment into new and yet individual contours. It was always I, but I was never the same. In brief, life!… But above all, the sense of liberty found, the exquisite enfranchisement from grossness! Free life!… The mere incomparable bliss of knowing what real life was!

Beyond this new and exciting experience of the reality of life, overshadowing it, reducing it to the function of a basis, was the sense of companionship, of partaking in a vast and profound communion, of utter giving and utter receiving, of transcendent interpenetration of spirit by spirit.... The double bliss of realising my self and of simultaneously, merging it in others!… Intimacy more rapturous, surrender more complete, than the closest intimacy or the most unreflecting surrender on the lower planes.... No desire but to outpour, to enrich the universal from the vase of the soul, to restore that which in the origin had been bequeathed. All joy seemed to be here, and this joy was the excuse and justification for the exultant joy in the discovery of the self. The value of the treasure was only potential till the treasure was lavished in an ardour of altruistic beneficence. The sublime instinct of the self was to plunge, melt, and be lost. This was the last supreme impulse of the primal urgency toward reality and truth. This was bliss.

Imagine this fever, this riot of emotion, directed and controlled by intellectual forces of a strength, a subtlety, and a complexity all surpassing experience, having gathered up into themselves the whole harvest of experience. Imagine reason and rapture in sublime co-ordination!… No! You cannot. Failing myself in the impossible, I am asking you to succeed in it. No gallantry of the brain can cross the spaceless gulf between two planes. I relinquish… And yet, all planes are one, and there is in you that which may divine the inexpressible.

Imagine the uncoloured light, intensely wavering; the plastic beauty of forms mutually responsive in the sensitive fineness of the medium; the greater beings, veiled in films of splendour; the rapture of the realisation of selves in freedom; the play of pure intellect; the fierce and calm rapture of universal communion; the sublime crisis in the yearning towards ultimate unity! Bliss!…Can you?

Chapter XXVII: The Past

In the tremendous calm of one of those periods of apparent coalescence, when all the marvellous faculties of the freed organism were more marvellously intensified and enlarged, I could review my careers from birth. I mean the birth into the earthly body. I saw what you call my life from beginning to end, as the winding course of a river seen from a high mountain. I saw it equally in detail and as a whole; day by day and simultaneously. It was for me, as I chose, either forty years of minute acts, or a single gesture passing in an instant of time. It seemed to me—not a tragedy, for I knew the sequel of it, but nevertheless tragic in quality; and exceedingly strange. Doubly strange! Strange in itself, and strange in my attitude toward it while I was living it! A disconcerting—even a shocking—and a revealing strangeness!

The casing of this 'me' in a coloured envelope which though fluid and not unresponsive was infinitely less so than myself,—that alone was an astonishing imprisonment; but that this casing should be interpenetrated by another, of an impossible grossness, heaviness, dullness.... 'Strange' was a word inadequate. Understand me—I say 'casing' in no tone of scorn for these envelopes. I recognised that they were a vital extension of me, that they lived by a separate life which, however, had its origin in me. But what a prison for me! Earthly fancy had never constructed or even conceived a prison to vie with this prison! What a living burial! I whose progressive evolution could work itself out by none but the finest vibrations—I had thrilled in vain against these callous walls. And what communication from beyond could ever reach me through them? They were impenetrable. I had been cut off from intercourse. I had been reduced to a sort of coma of futility while these living envelopes went their ways, unguided. I had been helpless. And yet not utterly helpless—for at rare intervals, by some fortunate coincidence of circumstances, I was able to give a fleeting signal of myself, or to catch a vibration fine enough to affect me. But for the most part—numbness!

Such was the experience, the ordeal, through which had lain the path of my evolution.

The immediate commencement appeared less pathetic than what followed. In the immediate commencement I was utterly dependent; my separately living body was utterly dependent. There was no choice in any

matter. On earth the existence of the infant had always struck me as extraordinarily pathetic in its dependence. But now, the more poignant pathos showed in the first stirrings of independence, in the first attempts to use that ineffably clumsy instrument, the body—its disabilities, its disadvantages, were so overpowering. Always preoccupied by its gross needs! Unable to live through more than a few hours unassisted! Stiff and hard! And yet how fragile! Continually in mortal danger! Slow and ineffective in movement, deaf to the whole range of sounds except the coarsest and nearest! Blind to everything except the outer surfaces of a few objects close at hand! Insensible to almost all vibrations! Stumbling, blundering!… The vision might have been less painful had I been alone in my limitations. But I had been one of millions of deaf, sightless, groping, maladroit entities that jostled each other obstinately and uselessly in the midst of a wondrous universe hidden from them. Yes, it had the look of a tragedy!

I saw myself, in my moving prison, starved, nullified; unable to transmit to my envelope the perfected potential faculties that were within.

Even what my enveloping and inferior consciousness did see and did hear and did feel, it saw and heard and felt wrongly. It was continually victimised by illusions and delusions. It had no perception of reality at all. It was wrong, wrong, and grew more inextricably wrong. The main idea underlying all its activity was wrong: the idea of gathering in instead of giving out. Its desires multiplied. Its imagined well-being depended on a daily increasing number of external things. That these multifarious things in no manner actually contributed to its well-being did not in the least discourage its obstinacy. The direction was diametrically wrong, and it hurried faster and faster in that direction, not heeding the obstacles it met and the hurts it received. Its wrong-headedness, seen as I saw it afterwards in that tremendous calm of freedom, was barely credible. Its steady cultivation of desire, with the inevitable result of an accumulation of discontent, was distressing for the mere stupidity of it. Then, the touching—yes, the touching—confidence in the potency of externals— externals that could never under any circumstances be assimilated! And, worst, the persistent unwearied attempts toward self-aggrandisement of all kinds, towards the creation of a wall between the self and its fellows, toward the

centralisation of the self upon itself; whereas the sole way of progress was so obviously in communion, in unifying, in the rich outpouring of the self.

I scanned all that incarnation, and could note scarcely an odd hour here and there in the long reaches of the years that had not been devoted to a thickening of the prison-barriers, and to the weaving of despair. Not one act in a million was an act of communion, of outpouring. And so I followed the course of my infatuated career till it came to a pause on the death-bed in Palace Court Mansions; and I could see that unqualifiable sight.... Consequence of an accident brought about by the morbid fever of desire, by the appalling determination to aggrandise and so isolate the self, by a ceaseless and violent egotism. There I saw the coarser envelope lying; fit symbol in its grotesque and futile seeming; surrounded by the extraordinary and complex apparatus which had been gradually collected together under the fixed delusion that such playthings were an aid to happiness! The childishness of it! The facile, inconstant joy in trifles! The inability to envisage a simpler, deeper, and larger joy! The strange conviction that bliss must be complex, changeful, fleeting, dependent on externals, and strictly personal; and that the absence of these qualities would involve monotony and tedium!… I saw that coarse shape lying with the bandage round its head, and the coins covering those eyes that had never seen, and wondered at the passionate epic which its own ineptitude had prematurely closed. Oh, heedless one! In vain had those ears heard the beginning of wisdom which somehow had got itself fairly translated into the gross medium of speech:

"The kingdom of heaven is *within* you!"

And what of the imprisoned 'me'? I was almost as I had been at the inception of the ordeal. Not much worse, and very little better. I had been protected by the coarseness of the envelope, whose slow and heavy vibrations could not affect me. The immensely greater part of all that violence and that superficial but genuine unhappiness had resulted in nothing whatever, stultifying itself. The 'me' was but atrophied by inactivity. And at moments, early in that life, when the envelope had responded to the incitement of youthful, uncalculating generosities, and later, in certain disinterested and careless outpourings of ideas concerning beauty in music,—at those moments the essential "me" had

developed in a swift blossoming. The growth was little, gravely little. But growth there had been, despite the apparent froward conspiracy against it.

I saw the earthly envelope, precisely as it must have been ages before —on that bed in Palace Court Mansions, with its violet gaseous counterpart floating still above it. My vision could not pursue it into its decay and dissolution. My vision was arrested at that point, attracted thenceforward to the vicissitudes of the other envelope, more ethereal and radiant. I gazed at the earthly envelope, not sadly, not reproachfully. It had served....

My second life, that long dalliance in a brighter, world of colour and illusion, seemed to me now to be even more pathetic than the grosser brief career that preceded it. At any rate, during the latter, no part of my consciousness had ever imagined itself to be in a heaven; nor had mistaken its own creations for independent organisms; nor had drugged itself with a conceit of its own perfection. I saw that this second life, with all its relative fineness, had been nothing but an exquisite atonement for the grand error of the other. In the first gross years (up to the moment when the coins were put on the eyes of the heavy envelope), instead of working toward freedom, I had steadily thickened the radiant walls of that prison of the 'me.' Nearly all that elegant preoccupation with art and beauty, all that refining upon refinements, all that fastidious rejection of the common ugly, had been based in desire, tending to isolation instead of to communion. The bright barriers that shut in the "me" had year by year grown more impervious.

They had had to wear themselves away in the fabrication of delicious but humiliating illusions. And during the ages of this atonement, the hour of my freedom had been delayed, until at last, amid the wreck of those real dreams, the shell broke, and I was born.

Now I could see the fragments of that shell floating in the universe which I had once deemed luminous, and in its essence rapturously alive.... Dull, garish, slack, inert! … Strange, the formidable power of self-deception! The strangest thing of all in all that universe was not that I had accepted a mere harsh glitter as absolute beauty, nor that I had amused myself so childishly with vain toys, but that I had remained so long and so completely in the conviction that bliss could alone proceed from the satisfaction of desire.

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All these matters I perceived simultaneously in a single clear and enlightening flash of pure perception, during one of those periods of tremendous calm, when existence itself seemed to be arrested in absolute achievement. Then existence resumed, and those visions of the past faded back into their true unimportance.

The least marvellous of the beings in that state was very marvellous, and consciously so. There was a universal exaltation in the use of fine faculties. Degrees, however, existed. I counted myself mid-way on the ladder of degrees. I beheld those who were certainly below me, considerable in number. But also I beheld those, considerable too in number, who in responsiveness, in elasticity, in rapidity of action, in the intense beauty of their outpouring, were incomparably my superiors. And there were, apart, the greater intelligences. I was with the large majority, I, who in the double envelope of bodies had masqueraded as a spiritual aristocrat! To think that I had failed to achieve a perfection which others had achieved and which might have been mine, grieved me. Grief was there. Grief was in that rapture; felt like a recondite dissonance in a chord of emotion; but pacified by the omnipresent and ardent sympathy which was the very atmosphere.

And I approached the nucleus. Although at any given moment few were entering it, the experience was withheld from none. Soon or late each being vanished into the invisible splendour of the nucleus, for a space of time long or short.

Chapter XXVIII: The Glimpse

No sensation of motion on my part.... But an increase of light; till light seemed gradually to become the absence of light, the complete absence of all phenomena whatever.... An ineffable solemnity inspired me, and a sublime apprehension, in the nature of fear, but greater than fear.... Disappearance of the last of those perfect companions.... Loneliness, and a torrent rushing under me.... A consciousness of the divine brooding which is without and beyond form.... The supreme adventure!

And then a cognition, startling, reassuring, that this was not happening to me for the first time, that I was no stranger in that solemnity, but a visitant since everlasting.

And in the ecstatic void the vision of the whole cycle of my existence began to be revealed to me, rolling itself backwards into the unguessed deeps of the past, so that I might learn. I saw the endless series of my lives, recurring and recurring in sequences of three—the imprisonment in the double envelope, the partial freedom of the single radiant envelope, and the freedom. The last an ageless realisation, the second a long purgation, the first an ordeal brief, but full of fate!

My perception was not now abruptly balked at the birth of the human soul known on the earth as Morrice Loring. I descried that out of which Morrice Loring came. I saw, amid the recurring epochs, incarnations far other than his. Morrice Loring was no more to me than uncounted other envelopes of flesh. I ceased to be Morrice Loring and became a legion. These lives flashed up before me, one anterior to another, mere moments between the vast periods that separated them. They twinkled and were gone, like shooting stars in the spirituality of the night. But, in the perfection of my faculties, I beheld them in detail as, before, I had beheld the one life. I could distinguish the hairs on the rough chest of a camel, the colours of the iridescence of ice, the glint of a sun on a piece of stuff, the gradations in the pupil of the eye of a young girl. I could trace the fall and rise to and from an explosion of wrath, the slow birth of a wish, and the spark of an intuition, the sudden resolve of renunciations, the lightest influence of an induced mood. And one life was not clearer to me than another. And one life was not more important to me than another. All were equally indispensable and disciplinal. The variety of those imprisonments seemed endless. Some were fevers of desire; others had almost the calmness of a final wisdom. Some were cruel; some were kind. In some the double barriers were so thin that the immortal prisoner shone through them; and men wondered. And in the next the walls might be hopelessly thick again.... Undulations in the curve of evolution....

But as the remoter past swam toward me in the vision, the development of that prisoner which was I showed unmistakable. He had seemed to be helplessly isolated in the prison named Morrice Loring, but in the light of comparison it was not so. Far back in the chain his captivity had far more closely resembled death, and his powers had far more closely resembled utter impotence. I could see him held fast in the grossness of bodies whose crude savagery would have shocked Morrice

Loring into inanition. I could see him borne within organisms of astounding coarseness that fought naked amid primitive dangers to preserve the horror of their lives.

Astounding, did I say? Primitive?… All this was naught. All this was not even the beginning of astonishment nor the end of the prime. Still further in the past, I saw that divine prisoner within the forms of roaming and solitary animals, in outrageous landscapes where there was no man, at an epoch when man existed only in the creative thought. And the forms of those animals waxed and waned in size, and waned and waxed, now leviathan, now trivial; and becoming ever stranger and stranger. And still at each dissolution of the prison a radiant envelope escaped, and the prisoner escaped from the radiance into the uncoloured light, and ultimately gazed amid an invisible splendour, as now he gazed at the spectacle of his evolution, to gather the harvest of experience.

And I saw that once, by some apparent hazard, he was flung back into the identical prison from which he had been set free, the envelope waiting in suspension to receive the disconcerted prisoner. And this accident occurred more than once.

I hurried flying through the vision of eternal time, driven by the divine curiosity to learn the origin of these ceaseless mutations, to arrive at the first of them and know the absolute fount from which I had sprung. I sought also to gaze forward into the future; for I knew that when I should have assimilated the latest of my experience I must enter another prison, and I hoped that I might discern it, even if dimly. But no! This faculty was not mine. And so I pressed backward.

And even all this was naught to that which, lying farther behind, rolled later into my view. In the twinkling of recurrent incarnations, a point came when the immortal prisoner, subdivided, was enclosed in many prisons simultaneously, instead of in one. Flying organisms.... Not birds.... Flocks that winged clumsily over an earth desolate and seemingly lifeless, but for them. Congregations of bodies bound by a collective will that dominated, though not completely, the separate parts.... Play of dull yet powerful instincts exercising themselves in large, confused, and concerted activities!… And as the incarnations passed before me, each disclosing an earlier one, the division of the prisoner grew more and more minute, and the multitudinous organisms more

and more simple, homogeneous, and less and less intelligent.... Until at length I was scattered for instants incredibly brief, shed abroad and yet indivisible, among myriads of almost exactly similar organisms that performed one act and died fulfilled. And the incarnations followed in a sequence of accelerating speed.

The globe upon which they groped was liquid, with here and there portions congealing. And my prisons innumerable could only exist in the intense heat which it exhaled. And this heat grew fiercer.... And in the past of still remoter incarnations the globe was a sphere of wreathing gases, white, but with a gross whiteness. And the incarnations were still swifter. And the gaseous sphere wreathed larger, spinning amorphous, the abode of transient life-manifestations of which I alone gave force to millions.... The dizzy vision stirred me as I watched it into a profound agitation. I thought: "I am surely approaching the origin and fount of uncreated perfection from which I sprang."

Then a cataclysm: a cosmic collision and disaster. And, perceiving the phenomena in the inverse order of their occurrence, I saw two worlds receding terrifically from one another, stone-cold and rigid as stone.

And myself, no more dispersed, but more than ever rigorously captive, voyaging on the larger of them!

The incarnations now were comparatively very long. And there might have seemed to be no symptom of activity either in the prisoner or in his prisoning envelopes. The world might have been locked in an unthinkable death. But it was not. It had only been approaching the impossible, and I watched it, in my vision, back towards life. I, as I saw myself, had at that stage sunk into a kind of stupor; I resembled a seed in winter. I bore within me all the past and all the future, but naught moved. And I watched myself, through again innumerable incarnations, farther through the recesses of the past, back into an intense and complex activity surpassing my highest condition previous to the cataclysm, and of an entirely different order from it. And in a rapid stream of twinkling incarnations, I retraced a strange succession of civilisations from their decline to their glory, and from their glory to their birth, on and on to an apogee of achievement.

And here, though that past was more distant than the faintest speck of star left behind in the lightning rush of systems through millions of æons, I could see it all to the minutest detail in my vision.... Other

beings! Another race of beings! Other landscapes! But the same laws! And the same supreme law! I could still follow a wish to its birth. I could still observe the ravages of desire! If my prisons were metamorphosed, I was still individually I, yet possessing attributes which I had since lost or which had since folded themselves within me in dormancy. Then the curve of evolution, always undulating, descended once more, and that world too shot onward into the past toward its sudden birth in the heat of starry collision. And again I saw two frigid spheres rushing into separation.

And I was still individual.

And thence backward the birth and death of worlds twinkled in a sequence as rapid and as clear as the sequence of my own incarnations had been. And I could follow the vast arching of the curve of evolution. And that curve, immense as it was, dwindled to be one of countless undulations in an infinitely mightier curve that gradually began to shape itself to my watching and awed sight. And I saw myself, diviner, rising on the great curve whose foot and whose summit were alike invisible, towards the ultimate beginning. And I would thrill in passionate anticipation of the revealing vision to come.... Then the summit of the curve would emerge clear, and it would bend downwards—without having attained.... To soar again! I could see that the modifications in me were profound and tremendous, under the eternal ordeal of desire and its purgation. But modifications of what? Pointing to what? … Why....?

Then I noticed that the shocks which marked the birth and the death of universes grew less violent, and their results less positive. The succeeding days of civilisation and nights of black and icy stupor were not so sharply divided each from each. The wavy course of time was tranquilised into a smoother path. And my incarnations were less imprisoning. The transitions from the state of freedom to the radiant envelope, and from the radiant envelope to the grosser body—especially the latter—were less abrupt and less clearly differentiated. There came an epoch when I never, during the complete cycle of an incarnation, entirely lost the consciousness of my real, central self, when that self never ceased knowingly and effectively to react upon its envelopes....

The curve was now mounting upwards, and at an angle bolder than any before. And in its flight the curve undulated far less than it had ever done.

And on the lower physical plane there was nothing solid. Matter remained fluid. And living organisms had a fluidity that was nearer the gaseous than the liquid. And the movement of these organisms was beautiful in its yielding and swift plasticity, resembling the activity of the radiant plane. And universes intermingled in their vague orbits, mutually unharming. And the varieties of the phenomena decreased in number, and there proceeded a great and comprehensive simplification.

And then the disappearance of liquid matter followed the disappearance of solid. And the elements resolved into one another, lightening; and the varieties of phenomena still decreased. And even the lower physical plane acquired radiance, until its highest intensity approached the lowest intensity of the radiant plane, and for brief instants the two might be indistinguishable.

I shook, watching the vision. For I now saw myself indubitably reaching back to my far fount and origin. I saw in myself the awaking out of quiescence of wondrous qualities, and still more wondrous. I saw in myself a creature nearer a divine absolute than even the great intelligences whose presence I felt around me in the nucleus.

And my incarnations were no longer imprisonments, but gentle and soft veilings in transient clouds of desire; little intervals of illusion out of which I emerged as from a waking dream. That terrible perverse impulse toward separation, that impulse which had so fatally vitiated the careers of Morrice Loring and of his predecessors backward through eternities of past, was scarcely felt now,—a mere faint, fleeting tendency to draw away, vanquished in an instant by the mighty original force of cohesion.

The universes of the lower plane became one, and cataclysms and transitions, and even movement ceased. Nothing but a uniform vibration marked the life of the plane. The elements, further resolving into one another, had become one element. Light grew, and, in the growth of light, the weight of grossness faded. The unique gaseous element spent itself in a continuous and ardent expansion. It had no longer the materiality of gas.... It escaped from the dominion of it own perceptiveness, and was lost in the plane of the radiant.

It was the birth of matter that I had been watching.

The curve of evolution shot still more boldly upward.

And in the radiant plane I witnessed myself easily purging away the trivial illusions of what had been the first of all my incarnations,—

illusions removed scarce appreciably from absolute reality. Then came the first incarnation—a reverie—and then I was in the radiant plane again, where the activity of desire was yet unknown. And then the iridescences, the chromatic complexities of the radiant plane began to simplify themselves in a growing brightness. And the buoyant atmosphere of that plane, compared to which the ether of gross physical conceptions is heavy and rigid as metal,—this atmosphere in its turn expanded towards its still less material source. And its colours died in the dazzling luminance of original light. Yet a little, and my vision had reached a moment before even the radiant plane had begun to exist....

And the spirit had no home but its fellow-spirit.

We communed, equal in the first freshness of our origin. And our communion was far completer than that between the most advanced of the companions whom I had quitted in order to enter into the nucleus. And our joy more intense!

The vision overpowered me. I saw myself in the very dawn of the divine. The communion of those unnameable creatures thrilled into a true coalescence, and surpassed it. And the being that was myself gazed with unclouded eye at the source of light and awe, gazing within. And with a sigh of supreme transport I began to yield up my melting individuality in exchange for the final self-knowledge in which resides the clue to the enigma.... I throbbed to the prime pulsations of timeless existence.... I saw.... I became …

The pulsations resolved themselves, with mysterious and formidable portent, into the vast reiterated summoning of a titantic gong that announced the unimagined....

Chapter XXIX: Accident

Extraordinarily skilled and efficient though my senses were, I at first thought that the reverberations of that unseen gong were a part of the vision which was passing before me; and I was mistaken. The mere perception of my error shook me. I trembled with forebodings, and I was distracted from the vision. The vision sank away from my sight,—or perhaps my faculties were now unable to hold it. I was alone in the tremendous calm of the nucleus. And under the persistent tolling I began to retrace the past,—actually to retrace it. I had followed the past up to its source, in my marvellous and revealing vision. But that

pursuit had been a vision, and for a vision I positively knew it. But now I was myself, in reality travelling backwards through the moments—the years, the ages, perhaps—that I had spent in the nucleus. And this happened against my wish, against my command, against my instincts. I tried passionately to arrest my course—the whole secret force of my being yearned toward the vision whose ineffable climax had been snatched from me—but I was powerless.

The gong grew louder; and it grew into a horrible torture. It seemed to be ripping harshly through the delicate veils that separate that which the eye may view from that which is too vile for sight. Veil after veil it seemed to tear asunder, growing still louder. And then I made the discovery, which debased the just pride in me, that the strident sound of the gong was not in the plane of the nucleus. It came from otherwhere. It was invading the forbidden and immaculate solemnity of the nucleus; sacrilegiously; with an arrogant summons for me. And I was afraid, dropping the incomparable dignity which clothes those who enter the nucleus, dropping my self-respect, and yielding openly to fear. I struggled hysterically with the influence that was pushing me backwards through my own history, and reached out desperately to the faded vision. Futile! I myself, under the sinister iteration of the gong, felt like an unholy trespasser in the invisible splendour that surrounded me....

The invisible deteriorated into the visible. I emerged on the confines of the nucleus. Greater intelligences loomed indistinct in their own effluence. They watched me. They saw my plight. They must have known that I was the victim of an obscene intrusion, that every law had been challenged by the power which was seducing me away. In the effort to obtain their sympathy I seemed to consume all my vitality. But they made no sign. And I was swept on, the gong still clanging its menace, and now I saw the nucleus from without, as the indiscernible core of the pure intensity of light that was the atmosphere of the plane in which I had found freedom. The entities who also had achieved that plane were living still their shining existence of emotion and reason wrought together in an exquisite responsiveness. This was my natural home. Mine was the right to remain there for ages yet. But I was hurried on, passing inversely through all the sensations which I had experienced there, tasting bliss in torment. And to these companions, too, I offered the

tragic plaintiveness of my appeal for aid; but none answered. And under the enchantment of the gong, I surged helpless along, clutching, fighting. And at length the strokes of the gong sounded fainter, and still fainter. I was re-entering the sleep from which I had awakened into freedom, awakened into birth. Life left me. But in the pre-natal state I could hear the muffled, obstinate, destructive summons of the gong.

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The prismatic and airy fluid of the radiant plane was vibrating about me when I became conscious again. And the gong was relentlessly striking its note that jarred through me and through the atmosphere. It was not yet satisfied. It still dragged me implacably on. It was still rending the veils that should not be rent. And as it had been foreign to the plane beyond, so also was it foreign to the radiant plane. I had followed its mandate, but it still came from otherwhere, uncanny and horribly discordant.

The medium in which I moved seemed to me just as beautiful as when I had quitted it.... That was part of the tragedy.... I had no sensation of being imprisoned in something heavier, duller, less responsive than myself.... That, too, was part of the tragedy. My consciousness was transferred to the thin, worn shells of radiant matter that enveloped the true entity which had returned from beyond. These shells were the only conscious 'me.' My memory of the divine birth and the divine adventure and the glimpse was already dimmed and tarnished. But it nevertheless remained in my consciousness, and by it—not by direct perception—I knew that the authentic and eternal 'me' was a fast and silent prisoner within the external shells of consciousness. I no longer struggled backwards toward that from which I had been dragged. I was deeply aware of the hopelessness of such a struggle. But I did fight to remain where I was, in the moment of pulsating calm, the moment of the extinction of desire and illusion.

I could not. The gong crashed through the mystic chromatic barriers and found me.

And at a dizzy speed I, unwilling and fiercely protesting, raced back over my own footsteps in the great field of time. An age was as an instant; eternities were as an instant. The shells of the living prison grew. *She* appeared. The beautiful landscapes appeared. The gardens appeared,

and the palace. And the music tinkled from an elfin echo into the full resonance of sublime art. The recumbent figures in the gardens arose and spoke once more with their refined and charming voices. The amazing books re-peopled the shelves of the gleaming palace.... And my memory, though languishing, said to me: "All these are tawdry playthings." And I knew that they were, while enjoying them. In the periods of reverie I knew this. But I had to retrace, and I did retrace, all the doubts, hesitations, and counterfeit delights through which I had passed on my way to my freedom. I yielded to illusion, aware of its illusiveness.

All that came and was gone. Those heavens shot away beneath my furious flight; vanished into the future, while I faced the past. My idyll with the perfect woman of my desire's creation was resumed from end to beginning in a flash. All her lovely attitudes, surrenders, acquiescences, discretions, audacities were folded into a moment. From the woman she returned into the girl, and the act that made her was undone, and she was not. And I was utterly alone again in the vibrant and iridescent air, watching the changing colours of it, and the gorgeousness of my own envelope, in a naive wonder. And my memory said to me: "This is garish. This is naught. This is death." And I said: "If only I could remain here, where I am!"

The gong still boomed its call, but louder.

A stupor slowly grasped me in its drowsy, clinging arms. I fought to loosen myself, for I was thrilled with horror at the apprehension of what awaited me if I could not resist. In vain!… All phenomena faded save the inexorable uproar of the gong.

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Then roused by something offensive and intrinsive, I perceived, monstrously, a pyramidal summit sticking up out of vacancy into the radiant air. I stared at it, dazed, puzzled, searching in memory for the answer to its conundrum. It was not strange to me. It was disconcertingly familiar. I fancied that the clangour of the gong came from it, but it was not the home of the gong, though now the sound was deafeningly near. The pyramid was tinted in multifarious dead opaque colours—earthly colours—a travesty of the rainbow, as the rainbow would have been a travesty of hues of that gleaming atmosphere.

Impossible to imagine aught more utterly revolting than the harsh, dark wound made by the pyramid in ethereal translucency. I stared at it, full of a terrible leisure, and still haunted by the clamour of the summons. I was not flying backwards now. The reversal of time had ceased to operate, and the moments as they passed were no longer contrary to me. And imperceptibly the recognition of the pyramid permeated my affrighted consciousness like a disease. It was the upper portion of the Albert Memorial, an immoderate unsightliness which even in the most squalid hours of the earthliest Morrice Loring I would always take every possible measure to avoid.

And I saw momentarily troops of the radiant floating by. They were departing. I, by reason of some accidental propensity in my original being, had escaped too soon and was returning. Not for the first time—according to that revealing vision of mine yonder, was this casualty occurring to me!

Then I saw the sun—your sun, looming sombre like a dead star in my radiance. Then the lower plane supervened, shutting off the radiance, and I saw the faint roofs of houses, with thousands of ghostly tin cowls gibbering crooked and bent on their chimneys. And in a canyon between two precipices of houses I saw two streams of people wending in opposite directions, doll-like, afar off and beneath me. Knightsbridge, Parkside, Piccadilly.... The effect was exceedingly bizarre, for the gross body of every one of these dolls was illuminated by the radiant body, scintillant and prismatic. And though the sun shed its brightness of a summer morning, the light of the sun was as darkness to the refulgence of these dolls. The spectacle resembled a procession of torches moving of their volition amid dim architectures.... Strange, that those vivid envelopes should excite no wonder!… Incredible blindness!

I knew now the significance of the gong. And I passionately denied it. "No!" I protested in a fever of refusal, "I will not go. Nothing shall force me to go. I will wander here for ever rather than go. It is against all nature that I should go."

But I went, slowly, surely, gnashing out my reluctance.... I went....

I was in my study, quivering near the window.

The gong ceased.

I said to myself, without surprise: "That clock has struck eleven!" I knew that the clock had struck eleven. During all the ages of my

descent from the crisis of the unfinished revealing vision, the clock in the vestibule had struck eleven. In the background of my exasperated consciousness, I could hear it ticking. But I would not listen to it ticking. I could not. I could not regard with curiosity even the familiarities of my study. For the whole of my faculties were instantly monopolised.

It still lay there—it! And the door showing the bed in the bed-chamber was still open. It still lay there, with the penny on one eye and the half-crown on the other, and the handkerchief supporting the flaccid jaw.... Obscene! Not meant to be looked upon! But I could look upon nothing else.

"Never!" I seemed to cry, fainting in a fearful nausea. "Never!"

Putrescent clay! Rigid, blighting prison! Grave of all the finer perceptions! Extinguisher of light!

Abhorrent basilisk, drawing me, drawing me, by a hypnotism a thousand-fold more odious than that of the eye!… Drawing me!…

A noise in my muffled ears. Noise of a coin rolling slowly and interminably along a polished floor circling, and then flopping to rest on its side.

Book III

Chapter XXX: Return

I was alone in the bedroom. And I was glad to find myself alone. For I felt self-conscious, I felt almost ashamed, of my return. I had been dead; I had received the treatment accorded to the dead. My co-dwellers in the flat had adjusted their minds to the fact that I was dead. Shame is a word too strong for the description of my state. But I was aware that I had created an exceedingly awkward situation, which would involve much social discomposure. Hence solitude was grateful to me. I said to myself: "But, of course, a corpse is left alone." The sinister idea that I might, on my return, have opened my eyes in a place quite other than this bedroom, might have vainly struggled against unyielding wood, utter darkness, and subterranean silence,—this idea did not even occur to me until hours later.

But scarcely had the coin ceased to roll on the polished floor when I heard noises in the bathroom. The door leading to the bathroom was at the other end of the bedroom from my bed, and on the same wall as the head of the bed. So that, as I lay, I could not see that door without turning on my side and twisting slightly. I knew, however, that it must be open. Then I heard footsteps, quick, hesitating, irregular. Then silence, and then a recommencement of the footsteps. Inez!… She was in the room. She was looking at me from my right, at a distance of about sixteen feet. I felt her presence. My eyes were open, but I did not move. Yet it seemed to me that I was capable of the effort of such a movement of the head as would have brought her within my field of vision. There was a conflict of volitions within me. I wished to meet her eyes, and I feared to meet her eyes. So I lay inert, but unmistakably blinking at the ceiling. I could hear her respiration. She came, stumbling, nearer to me. She passed round the foot of her own bed, seized it with one hand; and we looked at each other. I said to myself: "This is a very trying moment for both of us." Her appearance startled me. She wore a plain morning dress, nearly new, and it had been put on with fastidious care, but on the front of the corsage was a large fresh yellow stain. Her hair was disordered. Her features seemed to have been modified less by grief than by acute anxiety. And, now, she seemed to be less astonished than

caught—caught in some secret act. Her lips were extraordinarily swollen, and vermilion red even to rawness.

Her mouth formed to speak: but she said nothing. She was about to laugh, she was about to cry; but she did neither. I felt poignantly sorry for her. But I could not show my pity; could not smile nor speak! I was held back from doing so by some deep instinct of restraint. Her eyes wandered, and stopped at a particular point on the floor. I knew that she was looking at the fallen coin. Suddenly she swooped clown on the coin, came to her knees, lay nearly flat, and clumsily arose again, the coin in her hand. She seemed ready to faint. I wanted to advise her calmly to be as calm as she possibly could. But I could not persuade myself to speak.

Then with another sudden hysteric movement, she plunged toward my bed, and knelt down—or dropped to her knees—at my side. I did not move. The other coin had lodged in a fold between the pillow and the sheet. She snatched at it. The two coins clinked together in her hand. She half raised herself, clutching at the bed, and began fumbling round my head with, her hands; owing to the coins she could only use finger and thumb of her right hand. I wondered what she was doing, but I did not stir nor protest, though I was very sensitive to contacts and hated to be handled—for example by a barber. Then I understood. She was untying the handkerchief which she had knotted round the jaw of her dead husband to keep it from falling. She drew it away at last, and seemed to try to hide it behind her.

"I put this round your head because I thought you might be cold," she said, in a peculiar voice, the voice, I should have supposed, of a person in severe physical pain.

Naturally she desired to conceal from me that she had taken me for dead. It was a feeble attempt at deception, quite unconvincing, an obvious failure. It would not have deceived me, I think, even if I had not watched her with my own eyes tie the handkerchief round the head of the corpse, and seal its eyes with the coins. But it was the best she could accomplish in her instinctive shame.

"Oh! I'm not cold," I whispered.

This was all we said; this was the whole of our exchange. No splendid phrase, bursting from the heart! No expressive gesture! No pathetic cry! Just a poor little stammering lie, and a banal remark! Yet she had wept

passionately on the body of that corpse, and I was assuredly full of an immense sympathy for her.

Without any warning of any kind she turned and ran, staggering, back into the bathroom. She literally ran. And as she went her whole body seemed to heave in a great physical crisis. She banged the door of the bathroom, but it did not latch. I continued to hear noises in the bathroom, now violent, now low and prolonged. I was left alone, neglected, ignored. I had foreseen that my return to life might produce strange manifestations in Inez, but the manifestation which it actually did produce was strange beyond my prevision. I perceived once again, as often I had perceived before, that the effect of intense emotion on the human organism is incalculable.

"The worst is over now!" I thought, with relief.

I glanced about the bedroom, and my eye rested with its old satisfaction on the furniture and the decoration of the room. In front of me, placed specially so that I could always see it as I lay in bed, was a reproduction of Velasquez's "Lady with a Fan." It seemed to me as beautiful as ever. And the light that came through the ground glass of the window seemed to me as beautiful as ever. Often had I watched that window gradually betray the dawn. Often had I deeply felt that pure silvery formless light was unsurpassable as a source of ecstatic æsthetic pleasure. And I felt exactly the same now. I did not regard the supernal beauties from which I had been exiled as a dream, or as in the nature of a dream. I knew that they were all as real as the coins which Inez had picked up, and as the bell-cord at my shoulder. I remembered that, during the period when I experienced those other beauties, every earthly phenomena had appeared to me gross, ugly, tawdry. Yet now my bedroom, and this common earthly light, did not lose by any comparison.

Nor had I the sensation of being a prisoner in my body. And my body did not seem heavy, hard, and unresponsive. I was not surprised that I had no perception of any kind of a radiant body enclosing the opaque. A few minutes earlier I had seen, veritably seen, all the wayfarers in Knightsbridge incandescent like torches shaming the sun, and had marvelled at their blindness to themselves. But I did not marvel now at my own blindness. I said to myself, as of another person: "He has lost

consciousness. It is only the outermost parts of his consciousness that are now active." But I did not feel this. I only reasoned it out.

I was not tragically grieved at my expulsion from those other planes. I was sad, but gently, mildly; with a melancholy that was almost agreeable to savour. There was in me no fierce longing, no impatient rebellion. And I did not immoderately regret my lost faculties—of vision, hearing, understanding, emotional elasticity, and nobility of sentiment. I did not consider myself blind, deaf, stupid, or ignoble.

Perhaps I was stayed by the thought:

"I shall go back. Nothing can prevent me from going back sooner or later."

Yes, this thought gave me a profound sense of security,—it was so sure. It was a rock. The wonder of the miracle of which I had been the subject solemnised me more and more as the minutes passed. I—not another, but I!—had been destined to this incomparably sublime adventure. Between the thought of my ultimate security and the dizzy thought of the grandeur of the dread privilege that had been mine, I thrilled. And, this, too, was a precious and exquisite experience.

My body began slowly to assert itself. I had no pain; I was not conscious of fatigue; nor, since I made no effort to move, of weakness. But, without any pang of hunger, I was aware that my body needed food. After a time this bodily desire destroyed all my other sensations, and monopolised me. I argued: "Why trouble about food? Why not sink away again? Food!… How ridiculously unimportant!" But argument was futile. I wanted food, and I wanted attention, and it seemed as if I had been completely forgotten by everybody. There was no sound now from the bathroom. Was I to be neglected for ever? It was astounding that Inez should leave me so. I began to see that I must help myself by performing some definite act. And I shaped the scheme of lifting my right arm and seizing the bulb at the end of the bell-cord and pushing against the little ivory knob on the bulb. I envisaged this enterprise as something complicated and difficult, as something requiring courage and energy, as something decisive and final, only to be done under extreme stress of circumstances. And just as I was prepared to raise my hand, I heard voices. And I stopped, as it were guiltily, holding all my frame intensely immobile, like a thief disturbed.

The voices were approaching along the passage which led from the kitchen to the vestibule. The principal door of the bedroom was ajar. The voices continued on the other side of that door, in the vestibule; quiet, awed, and—one of them at any rate—loquacious. This was the voice of my cook, a woman whom I had not heard utter a dozen words in a month, a woman of whom my impression was that she never spoke.

"Yes," I heard my cook say, "Marion—that's the parlour maid—she's gone to bed. Mistress sent her. And really between you and me she was fit for nothing, didn't know what she was doing of, no more than that clock—not so well. As soon as ever eight o'clock struck mistress sent me for the porter to take two telegrams, one to master's sister—so the porter told me—and another to Captain Hulse—that's a friend of the family. I don't know why she didn't telephone to captain Hulse. They're always a-telephoning. I suppose she couldn't fancy it—telling him over the telephone as master was gone. It was when the porter happened to mention to me as you were in the Mansions, laying out those poor twins on the first floor, as I first thought how handy it would be for you to step in here, you being close to, like, if you understand me."

"Quite," said the other voice, drily—it appeared to be a better educated voice. "Where is your mistress, Mrs.—what's the name?"

"Loring." My cook's voice dropped: "I expect she's lying down a bit in the drawing-room.... So I told her you were in the Mansions. And you may not believe me, but she'd never given a thought to his being laid out, like! It hadn't crossed her mind as he ought to be laid out as soon as might be.... However, I needn't tell *you* that! No! She gave a regular start. I told her it might be too late for him to be laid out properly even now, but——"

"When did he die?"

I heard my cook suddenly weeping. "Two o'clock, it seems. Two o'clock or hardly. And the doctor ain't been since. Eh! I don't know what! All at sixes and sevens. There's nothing like a corpse for putting everything at sixes and sevens. So mistress told me to go down to the first floor, and her compliments and would you step up here as soon as you'd finished down there. I don't know whether I shouldn't prefer you to go and get it done without disturbing her, poor dear! I always think it's best as these things should be done quiet, like. Of course you know best——" Tears again.

"Which is the room?" asked the other voice.

"It's here," said my cook. "He makes as fine a corpse as ever you see! And you'll say so, ma'am, though of course my experience is nothing to yours."

She pushed open the door.

Had it been possible, I would have spared my cook the ordeal that awaited her within the doorway. I felt extremely sorry for her. But I was helpless. I saw her stoutish figure in the doorway and her tearful, excellent face; and behind her another woman, younger and thinner, in a cloak and bonnet.

"Eh!" the cook faltered as her eye met mine.

She seemed to waver backward. All the colour left her face.

"Now, cook," I reassured her, in a tone weak but persuasive. "Bring me some milk and soda, please, at once,"

"Nay, nay!" she moaned, withdrawing. "Him asking like that for milk and soda! He's asking for milk and soda!… I suppose it's no use you waiting now, ma'am.... And there's the front-door bell. I do pray and beseech Almighty God it's the doctor. All sixes and sevens!"

The door was pulled to.

Chapter XXXI: The Mystery

The voices of the doctor and of Mary in the vestibule reassured me. By chance these two must have arrived simultaneously—met perhaps in the entrance hall of the Mansions. There was now no necessity for me to take on my own shoulders the burden of our servants' nerves. (Already I was foreseeing that the cook would be running off to wake Marion with the news of my existence, and that the atmosphere of the flat would thus be doubly charged with panic.) Nor need I harass myself concerning the mystery of my wife's strange seclusion in the bathroom. Both the doctor and Mary were the kind of people who are never overmatched by an emergency, with whom the proud consciousness is always present that nothing can rob them of their common-sense and their wits. Their influence on the situation was at once manifest. After a few excited sentences from the cook, there was a sudden hush, caused no doubt by an imperative gesture from Mary. The bedroom door was noiselessly latched, and I heard no more. Mary and the doctor had evidently led the cook away into the dining-room (which was farthest

from the bedroom) in order to learn in detail the astounding facts which the frightened woman had briefly disclosed in a hysterical cascade at the front door.

It was a situation which would put a strain on even their self-possession.

I heard a faint stirring in the bathroom.

After a few minutes the bedroom door opened gently. Again I had that feeling of awkwardness, as if I had done something in respect to which my attitude ought to be slightly apologetic. Mary entered, followed by the doctor. They bore themselves well—they had arranged on their faces an admirable imitation of perfect calmness—but they were certainly at the limit of their powers.

"Well, Morrice," Mary greeted me quietly. "It seems you took advantage of my early departure last night to go and be very ill.... Yet he doesn't look so very ill, after all, does he, doctor?"

I could have wept—because I was so touched by the proud adequacy of Mary's bearing. I knew Mary; I knew what she was concealing of emotion; I lived in her for an agitated instant,—and I say that I could have wept from sympathy with her.

I smiled. They were on either side of the bed, glancing down at me and hesitating.

"Let's have a look at him," said the doctor gruffly.

"Where's Inez?" Mary demanded.

"In the bathroom," I whispered.

And at the same moment there was a peculiar and disconcerting noise in the bathroom, and then we heard a moan.

"Poor thing!" Mary exclaimed. "I'll go to her."

"Now, my boy," said the doctor, when he and I were alone. "Keep still. Just let me examine that precious heart of yours, will you?"

While his head was bent to my breast, I said:

"She thought I was dead, you know."

"H'm!" he said, lifting his head, and taking my pulse. "So it seems. It's a mistake people make sometimes. I should have come long ago, but I was kept by a midwifery case—seven blessed hours, if you please.... Well," he gazed at me quizzically. "You're a long way off dead. But let me tell you," he added grimly, as though calling back a little lad who was

running too joyously off after being acquitted of some serious charge, "let me tell you you've had a darned near shave, my friend!"

A darned near shave! For him, my adventure was to be summed up as a darned near shave. All those wonders, miracles, ecstasies, revealings, terrors—unique and unutterable—were a darned near shave. I had seen the infinite, I had travelled through millions of years and come back through millions of years, I had had knowledge of myself, I was made sacred to myself and set apart, every human being was made sacred to me and set apart,—and it was a darned near shave! But how could he guess? How could he surmise, he preoccupied always by the heavy labours of his profession? I felt sure that, could I only begin a narration to him of my darned near shave, in the right key, could I only induce in him the right receptive mood, nobody among my friends would be more imaginatively impressed than he, and nobody more sympathetically curious and enquiring. But I should never be able to begin the narration. I should never be able to speak about it. The risks of a misunderstanding, of a failure to communicate, would be too great. I would not court the wound that incredulity might inflict. I could not have borne to see hiding behind the doctor's controlled face his ironic reflections upon the deluding power of delirium and dream. And just as no one could be more sympathetic, no one was more capable than the doctor of a blasting satiric silence when his terrible common-sense happened to be affronted. No! I should have to accept the definition of a darned near shave. I did accept it; there and then I reconciled myself to it.... The fault was not the doctor's; but the deprivation was his, and I was sorry for him.

"I think I'd better have something to eat," I said.

"Oh, you do, do you?" said he.

He could not hide his joy in the interestingness of my case. His pleasure pleased me. It was a pure scientific pleasure, untinged by desire. I thought how fine and how naive he was.

"When did you—come to yourself?" he asked.

"About—I don't know—a few minutes since. I suppose."

"Well, we'll see about getting something into you." He cleared his throat as if preparing to call for someone, and glanced at the door, at the bell-cord, and at the bathroom door. His spectacles gleamed momentarily white.

The bathroom door, which Mary in her immense discretion had closed, was opened again, and Mary appeared.

"Oh! I say, Mrs.——," said the doctor, unable to recall my sister's name. "This individual is as right as a trivet."

Mary did not smile.

"Can you come here a minute, doctor?" she asked gravely.

"Yes," said he.

They both vanished into the bathroom. Once more I was neglected, ignored. Inez must be ill. The night and the morning, and that body of mine, and my resurrection, must have been too much for Inez. It seemed to me shocking that events should compel a woman of Inez' temperament to go through the spiritual convulsions and perturbations to which she must have been subjected. The idea horrified me, as the mental picture of a conscious dog vivisected will horrify. I could feel all that Inez must have suffered. I thought that a long future of continuous happiness could scarcely compensate her for her sufferings. I wished ardently to arrange somehow a due recompense for her.

Mary appeared.

"We're just going to bring Inez in here," said she, in a tone carefully casual. "She isn't well."

I expected that they would lead Inez in. But Inez was carried in, stretched out horizontally, the doctor at her shoulders and Mary at her feet. They laid her on her bed.

"But——" I began.

"Don't worry yourself," the doctor interrupted me. "You can't do anything. She's unwell." Then to Mary: "Chalk's what I want. And limewater. And then hot flannels and so on. Chalk first."

"Yes," said Mary, and went out silently.

The doctor also rushed out of the room into my study, and returned with a large threefold screen, with which he shut off my bed from the other one. Behind the screen I could now hear his movements, and the moans of Inez. Articles of her clothing were flung out beyond the shelter of the screen. Excitement and movement increased. People came in and out of the bedroom. The screen hid the principal door, but I could hear Mary, and I could hear the cook, and then I could hear Marion. The doctor gave orders to everybody, and Mary gave orders to the servants —polite, but coldly incisive and peremptory. And I could hear the

pouring out of liquids, and creakings of the bed, and cries from Inez, and Mary's soothing reassurances to her.

"What's that?" I heard Mary demand.

"Its milk and soda for master, Mrs. Dean," the cook's voice replied proudly. "He asked for it. Shall I give it him?"

"Yes. Give him anything he wants," said the doctor curtly.

The cook made her appearance in front of the screen, benevolently triumphant with the milk and soda. In the midst of all the commotion caused by her mistress, she had remembered my request, and she was proud of having remembered my request. When I had drunk the milk and soda,

"There!" she murmured, satisfied, and ventured to arrange my pillow. She had recovered from her fright, and was now burning to atone for it. She was ready to melt in her solicitude. I smiled and was rewarded, and it seemed to me pathetic that such a trifle as a smile from me should produce in her such delight. She dared not remain longer by my side, and so reluctantly departed, the empty glass rattling on the plate. I wished that I could better have made her comprehend the degree of my appreciation.

Mary appeared. She had taken off her hat, and was wearing a servant's white apron, and a pair of slippers. She raised her hand to enjoin silence in respect to events on the other side of the screen. I nodded. "You all right?" she whispered. I nodded again. There was almost silence now on the other side of the screen. The doctor appeared.

"Look here," he said, very quietly. "I think if this young man could be removed to the sofa in the drawing-room… Can you fix him up a sheet and pillows on the sofa? We shall be able to look after him better there. Not that he wants much looking after, now."

"Yes," said Mary. "I think that's a very good idea."

My transference to the sofa in the drawing-room was executed with the maximum of celerity and comfort under the direction of these two. I discovered that I could walk with their aid. And as I passed slowly through the study, I felt like one who passes through a country unvisited since childhood. So I lay in the drawing-room, and was abandoned again. The cook brought me more food.

"Will you tell Mrs. Dean I want to speak to her, if she can spare half a minute?"

"Yes, sir," the cook agreed heartily.

During the brief time that the doctor and Mary had remained with me in the drawing-room, superintending my installation, I had waited for one or the other of them to enlighten me as to Inez. I knew that Inez was suffering from more than a mere indisposition consequent upon nervous shock and strain. But neither of them said a word. We were alone together in the drawing-room, where Inez could not overhear, and yet neither of them had said a word. And somehow I had not been able to bring myself to ask. Strange! Strange on their part and on mine!

Now the mystery grew, and seemed to pervade the whole flat. I could not support it.

Mary entered, quickly, quietly, with questioning face.

"I say, Mary," I asked her as cheerfully as I could. "Is anything really the matter there?"

"Where?" She stiffened.

"Inez?"

"She's certainly ill."

"What's up?"

Her features became severe, refusing. She could not help it. It was in her character to decline to yield to the whims of a patient who ought to have no will of his own. It was in her character, in a time of difficulty or crisis, to act in the best interests of those weaker than herself gently but ruthlessly regardless of their unreasonable wishes. The instinct in her was deep. She—or she and the doctor in council—had decided that it would be better for me not to occupy myself with Inez' condition—had they not removed me from the bedroom?—hence I was on no account to occupy myself with it. I was to be content with such information as was considered proper for me. There was no danger for me, and I was to be treated strictly according to reason. I could read all that on her face. And yet she wanted to tell me; she brimmed with the mysterious fact withheld. Only the stern instinct prevented her from brimming over.

"I——perhaps the doctor will be popping in here soon," she said, and moved away. "You all right?" she added at the door, smiling seriously.

"Yes, thanks," I said. I knew how she felt, and how the instinct of harshness, under the guise of reason, influenced her conduct. I was often conscious of the same instinct in myself.

The doctor did presently come in.

"The truth is," he said, sitting down on a chair near the sofa, "your wife's been drinking oxalic acid. I should say she must have drunk about three penn'orth of that stuff. I found the bottle in the bathroom. From what I can learn she must have drunk it about half-past ten or so this morning."

I said nothing.

"It's just as well you should know," he added.

"You, see, it's so handy, oxalic acid is," he explained. "Every woman keeps it for cleaning straw hats, or taking stains out of linen. It's so infernally handy."

"But do you mean to say it's fatal?" I asked.

"Not always," he replied. "I may pull her through."

The tone was not convincing, nor apparently was it meant to be convincing. His eye, when it caught mine, seemed to be saying: "Whatever the vagaries of human nature, the true philosopher is never surprised by them. And one vagary is not more strange than another."

He had been up all night He had probably had no sleep for about thirty hours. He had assisted almost continuously, during that time, at scenes of danger and emotion, and yet he was master of himself and of his body. He did not even yawn. He might have just strolled gently down Bayswater Road to see me about a trifling complaint, after a long night's rest and a leisurely breakfast. Despite the frankness which he used to those whom he treated as his equals in practical philosophy, there was always a mystery behind the glint of that man's spectacles. Such was his grim power that for a few moments I did not truly realise that Inez had been trying to commit suicide. I knew the fact, but I did not realise it. The realisation came gradually.

Chapter XXXII: The Bedside

"Morrice!"

Mary came into the drawing-room with a new burden in her voice. It was late in the afternoon. The doctor had gone. A nurse had been sent for, but had not yet arrived. Mary had reorganised the life of the flat on a fresh basis, with Inez on her bed as its principal centre, and me on the sheeted sofa as a subsidiary centre. And already, under Mary's wand, under her perfect confidence that she was equal to the situation, the life of the flat was running smoothly and regularly. No noise! No confusion!

No hysteria of servants! Hysteria could not exist near Mary. She had doffed the apron—sign that order reigned. And yet now there was apprehension in her voice. She looked at me in silence, examining me, apparently undecided.

"How is she?" I asked.

"She wants to see you," said Mary. "I don't know what the doctor would say. I really don't. Do you think you could get as far as the bedroom without doing yourself any harm? You're very weak."

"Oh, yes," I said. "I must come. I feel quite all right. I must come."

"She wanted to come to you. In fact, I had my work cut out to, stop her. But you're certainly better able to go to her than she is to come to you, and as she wants to see you——"

"Considering that I walked in here——"

"No, you didn't." Mary corrected my pride somewhat curtly. "You were practically carried in here. Perhaps, if I help you, and one of the servants."

"I don't want the servants—"

"No," she agreed. "But——"

She would carefully weigh every project. She would leave nothing to impulse when risks had to be faced.

"You can't stop with her long, you know—it wouldn't do for either of you," she said, as we passed through the study.

The bedroom was arranged with minute neatness. The first thing I noticed was that my bed had been made, and the counterpane disposed in an unfamiliar way. Mary must have made the bed herself. There was a faint odour of eau de cologne. At the side of the other bed was a table which had been carried in out of the vestibule; it had a white cloth and was covered with bottles, glasses, and some larger vessels. Between the two beds a chair had been placed for me. It appeared to me that I was afraid to look at Inez. I distinguished her form on the bed while my eye avoided her. I dropped into the chair. Yes, I was weak. I could feel the tears rising, and I sought to drive them back.

"Be sure to keep your dressing gown well over your knees," Mary whispered. And then she left us, with silent tread.

Why should my eye have been timid to look at Inez? I do not know. Throughout the afternoon I had been thinking: "How she must have suffered—to make her take the poison!" And now that I was by her side,

the conception of what she had suffered lacerated me almost intolerably. Of course it was remorse that had driven Inez to suicide. I could picture to myself her violent remorse, her remorse holy in its intensity. I knew how she must in her own mind have torn to pieces the arguments with which she had defended herself to me, accusing herself of my death, and judging her conduct in the light of its accidental consequence, despising logic in a paroxysm of contrition. I could picture to myself her existence through the night and the dawn. I knew that she had changed her dress, and that she had dispatched telegrams. She had probably kept an appearance of calm, probably convinced herself that she was calm. And then suddenly, with no warning, she had yielded, and her remorse had be come a frenzy. And in an instant she had thought of the oxalic acid. Was it just before she drank it that she had prayed for my everlasting welfare? It must have been in some such supreme moment that she had prayed.

When I looked at her the conception of what she must have suffered overpowered me.... It was her presence.... I was startled, shocked, to find that I could not control myself. Tears ran down my face, as I had seen tears running down the face of children. A little more, and I should have sobbed.

Her hair was loose over the pillow. Always there was something strange to me about Inez, and especially about her hair, when she lay in bed.... I don't know.... A disclosure of the original woman.... I suppose it was the revelation of the true forms and attitudes of her body, and the revelation also of the depth of her physical life. Inez lived in her body.... Do you understand me? … She thrilled in her body as some people thrill in their souls. It was splendid. It was rare and distinguished. And her loose hair on the pillow, or perhaps the abandonment of an arm, was the symbol of all this. I could feel it now. Her face was bloated, the lips redder and more raw than ever; it was drawn into a permanent and profound apprehensiveness; her breath came difficult and irregular; a hiccup shook her. Nevertheless, I could feel now all the fineness of what her physical life had been; it had all receded to her wide-spread hair, and was therein visible.... But the change, the havoc! Last night I had been the victim, the ravaged remnant of a man, and she the perfectly functioning organism. Now, my blood was flowing strongly, and she was the victim. While I was in the drawing-room I had

speculated, with remarkable detachment, upon the wondrous and dire adventures that were awaiting her if she should die. And I did not much grieve, because I watched her through them to the climax. Indeed, I envied her, in that she might precede me thither. That was in the drawing-room. But as I sat by her bed, and timorously looked at her corrupted and broken, I could have cried out to her, that if she would only recover and forget, I would never ask of destiny another favour. So terribly was my sense of justice outraged by her martyrdom! I wanted to pour my strength into her, and by the magic of an intense volition restore that skin to its pure brilliance, and the contours of that face to their soft carelessness.

What could I say to her? I could say nothing except her name.

She raised her head anxiously, and looked in turn at the three doors of the bedroom, to see that they were all closed.

"It wasn't all true," she said, in a whisper, when she had satisfied herself about the doors, "what I told you last night"

"Don't worry about that now," I said, trying to make of my voice a reassuring caress. But my voice was broken, and I averted my face to hide my tears.

"But I must," she went on whispering. "It's very important. It's very important for everybody that you should know. I was only playing with Johnnie, and he was only playing with me.... My fault! I drew him on. Yes, I drew him on. When I say 'only playing' I mean it wasn't serious. It wasn't honest. I might have been his mistress to-day, but I didn't really care for him, nor him for me. I pretended to myself I did; but I didn't.... Just wickedness, wickedness!"

The sentences were interrupted by the hiccup, and by her difficult breathing. She looked at me fixedly, with a set, anxious face. One hand was hanging limply over the edge of the bed. I could divine that she wished to humiliate herself utterly; her nature compelled her to be spectacular. And my wish was to put an end to her self-humiliation. Then I thought: "But if this display satisfies her instinct, what right have I to try to stop it? She is perfectly sincere. She has her way of self expression, and I have mine."

"I hope you aren't going to worry about all that," I answered. "What you said about *me* last night was true enough, anyhow. It's all just as much my fault as anybody's. Let's both forget it."

If I, too, could have humiliated myself deeply, if we could have mingled in passionate abasement, each snatching remorsefully at the whole of the blame, she would have been more content. But this was beyond me.

"It's very important in this way," she went on. "He really is in love with Mary, though he doesn't quite know it. He really is. And of course she is with him. I was only interfering.... Jealous. I stopped playing the piano last night because she was too close to me. I could feel…"

"Yes, yes," I interrupted her. I could not help myself.

"But you understand why I'm telling you all this?" she insisted.

"Yes," I said, more gently. But I did not care. I was too tortured by sympathy for her to be interested in information about other people. "Can I get you anything?" The maintenance of life seemed to be so difficult to her that one's first thought was to press aid upon her.

"Now I want you to promise me something, Morrice," she said, never raising her voice above a whisper.

I made no response.

"Father Crowder is coming. He will give me extreme unction. And I want you to be here, Morrice."

I had a strong antipathy to priests of all kinds, though I disliked Roman Catholic priests a little less than others. No priest had ever entered my home. It had not occurred to me that Inez, supposing her to be desperately ill, would have need of her Church. She seldom spoke to me of her religious practices. I never knew when she went to confession. Save for her punctiliousness concerning the observation of Friday and of Lent, I might almost have forgotten that she was a professed Roman Catholic. I was now being reminded! The idea of assisting at a religious ceremony in my own home revolted me. I should have to kneel!… Could I not excuse myself on the plea of my illness? Surely I was weak enough!

"Certainly, if you wish it," I said. Why should I not gratify her by the sacrifice of some of my intellectual pride? To kneel—was it so grave to kneel?

"Thank you."

"But you'll be all right again in a week," I said. "The doctor said he should pull you through. And he will." At the moment of saying this I truly meant it. I could not think that Inez would die.

"Touch my hand," she said.

It was ice-cold. I put it under the bed-clothes. I can still remember the feel of the fine lace at her wrist.

"Have they told you what I did?" she demanded suddenly, in a different tone, having changed her posture.

I nodded.

"I thought you were dead," she said. "I thought I'd killed you."

"Inez!"

"You must kiss me," she whispered. "Don't hurt me—my lips."

She slightly raised her face. There was an appeal in it, plaintive, simple,—I don't know! I sobbed.... I thought I could write down everything, but I can't....

Chapter XXXIII: The Ceremony

It seemed to me impossible that she was near death. I could not imagine her dead. And yet that night, in the bedroom, and in the flat generally, an atmosphere presaging immediate death was created. The weather was close, and doors and windows were left open. We expected the priest. We listened for the arrival of the priest. I lay in my study; Mary had caused a bed to be arranged for me there. Save the resulting lassitude, I felt nothing of the violent attack which had overthrown me on the previous evening; and the doctor had said that I had only to regain my strength. I lay on a folding-bed, and watched the window as I had watched it twenty hours earlier. I could not yet envisage clearly and proportionately either my adventure or my return therefrom to the dailiness of existence in the flat. I mused on it vaguely and intermittently. My reflections had no distinct form and no particular tendency. Wonder: that was my state. One of my faculties was absorbed in listening for the advent of the priest. Then I heard the front door open and shut, and I heard a man's rich voice. Was that the voice of the priest? Was the priest in the flat? And after another minute the door between the study and the bedroom was mysteriously closed. And then Mary came into the study from the drawing-room, and said:

"He has come."

"The priest?"

"Yes. He is with her."

The priest was in the flat. We looked at each other, Mary and I. I knew what was in her mind, for the same thing was in my mind. Never should we be able to eradicate from our mentality the attitude toward the Roman Church—half hostile and half awed—which a Protestant mother had unwittingly formed in us. For over twenty years we had been completely emancipated from the external imposition upon us of any dogmatic ideas concerning religion; the Protestant mother had died when Mary was twelve. We had an equal intellectual disdain of all dogma. And yet a Roman Catholic priest, and the rites over which he presided, escaped somehow from our disdain. We despised our mother's clergymen. But her horror of the astuteness of priests had had a result in us which she did not foresee. There was something grandiosely unnatural about a priest, something uniquely impressive. Even my revealing adventure could not make me class a priest with other servants of different gods. I remembered the solace of Inez' prayer for the peace of my soul. There at any rate the Church of Rome had triumphed in Inez. When Mary said that the priest had come, it seemed to me, and it seemed to her, as if the Pope had come into my home, as if the whole Catholic Church, its traditions, splendours, cruelties, and sublime tenacities had come into my home; as if the Middle Ages had entered in scarlet. The nostrils of my imagination smelled incense.

Inez was being confessed, in her half-delirious weakness. The priest was hearing matters that I could never hear, judging with an authority that I could never exert, consoling with a balm that I could never offer; I, her husband; I, who knew more than any priest had ever known! I could tell Inez nothing of what I knew; the idea of attempting to tell her had not even occurred to me.

Mary left me, nervously. I had not informed her of Inez' request. Strange diffidence between brother and sister! I had been sitting up in bed. Without too much difficulty I left the bed, and sat in my easy-chair, wrapped from head to foot in a dressing-gown. There I waited, uneasy, not knowing exactly what would happen nor what would be the sequence of events. What did happen was precisely the thing that I had not anticipated. The little door giving direct access to the bedroom opened, and the vestmented priest himself appeared and summoned me. There was no greeting between us. He glanced at me, seemed startled at my attire, hesitated, and then beckoned, without a word. His

gesture was dignified. I obeyed. Evidently he was unaware that I was supposed not to be able to walk without assistance. I followed him, and softly closed the door.

I was surprised to see Marion in the bedroom. She was busy at the dressing-table. All its usual array had been removed from the dressing-table, and a white napkin spread. On the napkin was a silver vessel, of no household shape, and a crucifix. My Regency candlesticks, and two others, had been taken from their customary place, and garnished with candles, which now burnt flickering at either edge of the dressing-table. There was no other illumination. Her spectacles prevented me from seeing Marion's eyes, yet I knew at once, from something intense and passionate in her posture, that she was of my wife's religion. And I had not known. It must have been she who had arranged the candlesticks. She was in apron and cap and starched wristbands, but she had ceased to be a menial and had become a devotee. Whether or not she had asked permission to remain in the room, I felt that she was determined to remain; I felt that she had promised herself this ecstasy and would not be denied. Upon seeing me, through the glass of the dressing table, she hurried towards me, and led me to the large chair near the bed. None spoke. Inez moaned slightly, moving amid her hair on the bed, and gazing at the priest, rapt. She was still troubled by the hiccup. The bed-clothes had been disposed in a particular way. By the dressing-table stood Marion, stiff and expectant, as I always found her standing in the dining-room when we went into dinner. I looked for her radiant form; I looked for the visible emission of her ecstasy in a flight of thoughts, but I saw only Marion in black and white. She knew not that I knew far more of her than she knew herself, and that her most secret emotions had not been hidden from me. She knew not that she had been a miracle to me.

The priest, having been to the dressing-table, approached the bed, and half knelt. And at the same moment Marion knelt, with the practised facility of one accustomed to genuflexions. And the robe of the priest and his profile stood out between the light of the candles and the whiteness of the sheet, and his shadow fell across the disfigured face of Inez, which she turned towards him. She shut her eyes, and with his thumb he anointed them in a crosswise motion, saying in a low, sad voice:

"Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever sins thou hast committed by seeing.... Amen!"

He was a stoutish man of about fifty, with an aristocratic but intelligent face, and fine nostrils; his hand was ringed, and it moved with gracefulness—a self-conscious hand. It was difficult not to believe that he was as convinced as the women were of the efficacy of his acts and words.

Then he crossed Inez' ears with that shapely thumb, and murmured:

"Through this holy unction, and His most tender mercy, may the Lord pardon thee whatsoever sins thou hast committed by hearing.... Amen!"

And thus with her nose and her mouth; till he came to her hands, and then to her feet. That the symbolism of forgiveness should be extended to the feet surprised and impressed me. I remember the pale, exposed feet of Inez, like the feet of a martyr....

Then the priest took the cross, as one might take a fragile jewel, and offered it to the pardoned lips of Inez, who kissed it with a rapturous fervour, and sighed content. In her life this moment was the culmination of the spectacular. I could feel in my heart the supremacy of its effect on her....

Later, Marion rose from her knees. The priest, reserved and taciturn, but with an unexceptionable dignified correctness, made his preparations for departure, and departed. Marion turned on the electric light, and, extinguishing the candles, put them away; then she rearranged the bed, and restored the customary array to the dressing-table; lastly, she folded up the white napkin. After a short interval, Mary and the newly arrived nurse came into the bedroom. Mary hovered round the bed, sympathising with Inez' sufferings, and murmuring remarks to the prim nurse. She made no allusion to the ceremony which had just concluded, nor was it ever mentioned between us.

"Now, Morrice!" she said to me warningly.

With her help I retired. Inez was still being shaken by the hiccup.

The doctor had considered that during the day her case had become desperate. He did not expect her to pass the night. It was not, however, till the fifth day that, after a prolonged period of weakness resembling coma, she expired.

Chapter XXXIV: Disturbance

She expired in the forenoon. It was Wednesday. I sat afterwards in the study, dressed, near my temporary bed. I had been enfeebled on the Sunday, the day following the visit of the priest, but thence onward I had made rapid progress, being constitutionally a man of very short convalescences. As I sat in the study, alone, I did not think of her as dead. I had requested Mary to have the deserted body completely covered with a sheet as soon as the nurse had made it ready for the shroud. I wished that Inez should not be distressed by the obscene sight of that which she had left, nor by the spectacle of her friends wasting upon it their lamentations. I also requested that silence and repose should be maintained in the flat. I chose the study for my solitude because the study had been the scene of my first experiences during the night of my adventure. It was in the study that the gross world had dissolved for me. As I sat in my armchair I could gaze at a certain red vase, remembering the moment when that vase, sole relic of the gross world, had jutted up alone in a sea of multicoloured radiance. As I sat in my armchair I was in the exact spot where the radiant form of Marion had reclined while emitting the chromatic shapes of thought, the spot which it had quitted on an amorous errand while Marion dreamed, the spot to which it had been recalled so brusquely by the jar of the open window in the night breeze. The study was, as it were, sacred to me, set apart from the other rooms of the flat. It was in the study that I had gone through the experience of being cast out from humanity.

Inez might be there. Assuredly she was somewhere near. When they came to tell me that she had passed away I went for a moment to her body, and after being satisfied that she had indeed passed away, I glanced about and behind me, as though I might discover her watching us. But I had not remained. In the study, gazing at the vase, or at the window where I had been captive, I was not afraid. I had nothing whatever of the common fear of the disembodied. But I was full of curiosity, anxiety, and solicitude. And I was self-conscious. She might be—she probably was—looking at me from some corner, appealing to me in vain for assistance and sympathy. She was criticising and judging me. She was being astounded at my blindness in not perceiving her. She was thrilled with a supreme alarm.

I was not aware of any personal grief. I did not think of her as dead. How should I think of her as dead when I could almost feel her glance upon me? But I was grieved for her. The acuteness of my sympathy was painful to me. I wished fervently to be able to reassure her amid the awful disturbance of her new sensations. Never in the gross world had she stood in such need of sympathy. I strained my eyes to see her. I thought that perhaps by virtue of intensity of volition I might, having regard to my knowledge, glimpse her, were it faintly, were it for an instant. But no! Then I recalled the mysterious gaseous counterpart which I had seen floating above my own bed on the night of my adventure. I did not want to return to the bedroom, but I did return to the bedroom, tip-toeing in my slippers. I approached her bed and explored the spaces above it for a trace of a pale form. But I could detect nothing. We in the gross envelope were cut off from such apparitions.

Like a thief fleeing I went back to the study and sat down again in the armchair. Not a sound in the flat! There was no sun on this window, which faced the west, but I could see the sunshine playing on the restless elm-trees. She had died in the daytime. Would that affect her? She had brought about her own departure by a wilful act. Would that affect her? I had fancied that I knew everything about the state in which she was. But how little I knew! Now, surely, the radiant world was breaking in for her upon the gross. Now, surely, the solid was melting for her, and two universes were merged in dire confusion. And, if she was looking at me, what she saw was not a man of flesh and blood, clothed, wearing slippers, but a radiant form pulsating in a sea of radiance. I had so seen Marion, and so Inez would see me. Marion, obsessed by a secret passion, had not concerned herself with me. Though I had but just departed, though the flat was full of the stir of my departure, in her heart she had been busy with nothing but her love. The shapes of her thought had not once been directed upon me as she sat waking or dreaming in the armchair. She had done naught for my solitude.

I set myself to think of Inez, to think of her in steady sympathy. I emphasised my ardent wishes for her safe passage across the difficult frontiers of this gross world. I pictured strongly her radiance, and my own, whipping my imagination to its full power, and strove to shed upon her a constant stream of shapes that should convince her of my understanding sympathy, and cheer her forward. I came nigh to seeing

her and the procession of my thoughts from me to her. The whole force of my being was concentrated in this effort to be of service to her.

The distant sound of the telephone-bell cut through my mood like a shaft. I fought against it, withdrawing more and more within myself so as to think powerfully. But after a time the door of the study opened from the drawing-room and Mary entered, and shattered my mood to pieces. She had scarcely left us for five days. She was calm but tearful.

"Morrice," she said, "I've just telephoned to the doctor. He says he'll come along at once. I asked him about the inquest, and he says that he'll do what's necessary."

The inquest! I was forgetting that Inez had committed suicide. It was so long since the act itself that her death seemed to be the result of a natural illness. An inquest—on the body! The body! I was being dragged back to that offensive and utterly unimportant remnant. I saw the inquest and the funeral as an endless vista of desolation cutting me off from Inez herself.

"There are several things to be done," said Mary.

"What?"

"Well," she said. "Several. Letters to be written, and—— But if you'll leave everything to me, I'll be responsible. You're certainly not fit to put yourself about."

"Oh yes, I am."

"Well," she replied caustically, "we shall see what the doctor says about that."

"What about Harold?" I asked.

Harold was Inez' sole surviving brother, almost her one relative. Mary had written to him on the Saturday, but he had left his home on Monday morning before the first postal delivery, and nothing had been heard from him. He was a commercial traveller, and apparently the letter had been following him on a journey in the north.

"I really don't know what to do," said Mary, "unless I take a cab and go down to his place of business and find out something definite. It's very annoying."

"No news of Johnnie yet, I suppose?"

She flushed slightly, as always at the mention of Hulse's name. She had telephoned to him several times during the illness, but he had

strangely gone to Paris and left no address. Hulse was heavily on my mind. One day Hulse and I would have to meet.

"No! Nothing! I can telephone again to ask if he's returned, if you like."

"Oh!" I said. "Do exactly as you think best."

"Then I'm to see to everything?… I can always ask you if I want to know anything."

I nodded. I ought to have felt very grateful to her. To help me she was entirely neglecting her child, who was far more important to her than a brother. But I did not feel grateful. I did not feel anything except that I must be alone and in tranquillity to think of Inez.

Mary closed the door. Invaluable woman! Priceless in an emergency! Absolutely reliable, absolutely capable! And genuinely sympathetic in her calm, dry way.... Tears in her eyes for Inez and for me! But where did she suppose Inez was?

I tried eagerly to repair the breach of the interruption. But in a few moments the door opened again and Mary reappeared, shut the door, and advanced into the room.

"He's come—her brother!" she said in a low voice. "Of course you'll have to see him."

She spoke thus of him as a stranger, because he was effectively a stranger to us. Mary herself, indeed, had never before set eyes on him. He was a man of about forty-five, a widower, with no interest in any art, and nothing whatever in common with either Inez or myself. I doubt if Inez and he had met on the average oftener than once a year since our marriage. I had seen him altogether perhaps half a dozen times. He had made no impression upon me at all. A silent being—silent because without ideas, without personality. A man seemingly bereft of ambition, and whose sole desire was to be left in peace in the groove which habit had formed. A solitary! He had the solitude of the commercial traveller from Monday to Friday, and the solitude of the unsociable, childless widower in a small suburban house on Saturday and Sunday.

"Have you told him?" I asked Mary.

"Yes. I told him everything as quickly as I could," said she.

"It won't do for me to keep him waiting," I murmured.

"No," said Mary. "But, of course, he understands you're an invalid."

I rose and went into the drawing-room, where Mary left me with him. He wrung my hand hysterically. I asked him to sit down. He was nearly as tall as myself, but thin, with a thin face, greyish hair, and shining eyes. He sat down and then burst into tears sobbing loudly. I could say nothing. Then, between his sobs, he began to tell me how, owing to an error of his housekeeper, Mary's warning letter had not reached him till the previous evening. He did not precisely blame us for not having made further efforts to communicate with him, but I could see the trend of his idea. I reminded him that I had been ill, and he cried: "Oh! I know! I know it couldn't be helped."

Then there was a silence between us.

"I'd have given anything to see her again before she died," he exclaimed.

"She was practically unconscious for several days," I said.

"Anything!" he repeated, not heeding me.

"It's a most astounding story!" he said, wiping his eyes—not furtively, but boldly, as though it was customary for a man to weep and sob in grief.

"Yes."

The astoundingness of the episode had shaken him violently out of his groove. The event had invested him with a certain importance in his own estimation. He was the only relative of this beautiful woman who at the age of little over thirty had taken poison under the misapprehension that her husband was dead.

"There never was such a thing heard of in our family before," he said.

His sense of the family was aroused. He represented the family; he was the family; and the family somehow owned Inez. I was merely a person who had temporarily taken Inez away from her family.

"Morrice!" he said. "I should like to see her."

He employed my Christian name awkwardly, as one not accustomed to use it, and scarcely even convinced of his right to use it. He was afraid of me, chiefly, I think, because he occasionally saw my name in newspapers.

I led him to the bedroom. I could not depute this office to another. He imposed upon me his own standard and code of propriety. We stood together staring at the sheet beneath which the form of Inez' body was

vaguely discernible. He drew the sheet partly away and gazed at the face, and sobbed painfully.

"Poor girl!" he muttered. "We were the last of our family; and now I'm alone! If anybody had told me that one of our family would ever commit suicide—! Where did she do it, Morrice?"

He continued to gaze in affliction at the disfigured face as though he were gazing at Inez herself. I had to show him the bathroom, and the large closet between the bathroom and the bedroom from a shelf in which Inez had taken the bottle of oxalic acid. I had to reconstitute the scene for him as well as I could. He was avid of details.

He burst out suddenly, his hysteric eyes glinting:

"How can you be sure it wasn't a mistake?"

"A mistake?"

"Yes. How can you be sure she didn't mistake the oxalic acid for something else?"

He clung to this notion, arguing for it with a certain ingenuity. There was a bottle of laudanum on the shelf, and an old travelling flask containing a few drops of brandy. She would of course be in a state of extreme agitation, perhaps almost beside herself. Supposing she had meant only to swallow a few drops of laudanum to help her to sleep, for instance! And there was the brandy, too! Had she definitely told me or Mary or the doctor that she had intended suicide? No, she had not. It was merely understood.... He examined everything minutely, then returned to the corpse, wept again, and covered it up. Mary came in, to extricate me, and he recommenced his argument passionately.

He stayed for tea, drinking a lot of tea but eating nothing. It was during tea that he heard about the visit of the priest. Evidently he regretted Inez's Catholicism, but he had forgotten it. The priest would know whether Inez had meant to kill herself. He would go and see the priest. Neither Mary nor I knew where the priest lived. But Marion knew; Marion had already, it appeared, shown curiosity as to the funeral service. Harold departed. His last words were: "It's a very strange thing to me, any member of our family committing suicide!"

Then came the doctor, and instantly after him the coroner's officer, with whom he had already been in communication—a policeman. A policeman in my home! I had to see him. It was always a question of the corpse, the corpse. Nothing but the corpse! I learned that by a fortunate

chance the inquest could take place on the morrow. The corpse would have to be removed to the mortuary. At night! These things were generally done after dark. People preferred it. Neighbours preferred it.... Endless, endless discussions, plannings! When the policeman, helmet in hand, had gone, and the doctor was going, I called the doctor aside, away from Mary. An unreasonable thought had flicked in my brain.

"You are sure she is dead? I asked him. Because——"

"Quite," he replied, and looked at me.

He understood.

More men arrived. They were in and out constantly; men accustomed to death. A coffin! And when darkness had fallen the coffin went down again. We saw no more of Harold that evening.

Mary went home for the night. I was alone. Where was Inez, then? I endeavoured to resume command of my faculties, but I could not. In spite of Mary's efforts to shield me from the situation, the corpse had dispossessed Inez in my mind and would not be ousted. I slept, and could not even dream of Inez.

Chapter XXXVI: To the Grave

I went to the inquest. The doctor would have signed a certificate that I was not in a fit condition to go—he advised me not to go—but I went. I felt that I was bound to go; it was a morbid desire in me. As I passed out through the hall of the Mansions into the Square I realised that the Mansions and the Square were agog about me, that I was a figure of attraction. I was the man upon whose eyes the coins had been put and who had come to life again only to find that his wife had killed herself from grief. It was a high sensation for the Mansions. The demeanour of the janitor in the porch was quite changed; superciliousness no longer showed through the thin mask of the obsequious. He summoned a taxi-cab with enthusiasm, and seemed to wish to lift me into it. And as the driver of the taxi-cab stared at my black, and stared still harder when I gave him the address, I thought that he too divined how sensational I was.

The shapeless and shabby room—in some impossible street—which served as coroner's court, was crowded and stinking. My policeman was there, bareheaded, officious, and busy whispering out his authority beneath the cold, clear remarks of the coroner to the jury. The coroner

sat on a plain chair at a plain table—a man, obviously, in whom conscientiousness strove successfully against a dislike of being habitually overworked. You could see and hear at once that he lived always in haste, yet would leave nothing undone that ought to be done. The jury, every one in an attitude of self-consciousness, blinked in a pew. There were thirteen of them, apparently more or less prospering dealers in small quantities of small commodities. An honest lot! I overheard that they had viewed the bodies. I wondered why just they should have been chosen by destiny to stare at the discarded envelope of Inez. I wondered why the discarded envelope of Inez should have been delivered over to their inquisitive and indifferent eyes. I thought how afflictingly cumbrous was the machinery by which society protects itself. I tried to think of Inez, to dispatch to her some message; but I could not, in that assemblage intent upon corpses; the mortuary—the museum of corpses—was next door. All the faces of the witnesses and the huddled spectators were under the sinister enchantment. The reporters, idle for the moment and openly bored by the remarks of the coroner, alone were exempt from it.

I found myself wedged in a group of gloomy women who seemed to be blind to the advantages of personal cleanliness, or who had tried to achieve it and failed. I remembered that if Inez were there she would see us all radiant, and that my punctilious frock coat would be no more to her than the foul shawls of these women. But I could not realise it; I could not. The obsession of flesh—and decaying flesh—had been put upon me, and would not be shaken off.

A neatly dressed lady in spectacles motioned to me. It was Marion, apart for once from her apron and cap. I had not recognised her. She was with the cook. The coroner's officer had intimated that it would be well for both of them to attend. Marion wished to draw my attention to Harold, who was gesticulating to me from the back of the court. We had not seen Harold since the previous afternoon. I made my way to him, and he began to explain how he had arrived at the Mansions immediately after I had left. He was in a state of considerable agitation. The coroner's officer called out 'silence.' "I must speak to you," said Harold. We went into the street. It was the priest that was on his mind. He had had great difficulty in seeing the priest, had not indeed seen him until that morning. The priest had declined to tell him anything that Inez

had said in confession, and was not to be moved by the argument that Harold was the head of Inez' family. Harold was outraged, to the point of regarding the whole organisation of Catholicism in England as a conspiracy against English family life. He asked why the priest had not been subpœnaed to the inquest, and kept repeating that the priest ought to be compelled to speak, and referring to the power of the law. In his deep mourning he was an incarnate protest against the invasion of his family by Catholicism. Then the doctor appeared along the pavement, and with his help I managed to convince my brother-in-law that the theory of an accident was perfectly untenable; at any rate Harold affected conviction. I could see that he was secretly accusing me of disloyalty to the memory of Inez in opposing the theory of an accident. I could read in his face his belief that he alone really cherished the memory of Inez.

We were summoned by an excited voice into the court. Already our case had been reached. The coroner appeared to be entirely familiar with it. His tone had somewhat changed. The unusualness of the circumstances had produced its effect even on him. In vain he sought to maintain his air of detachment and use. Moreover he disclosed that he was familiar with my name; he uttered my name and calling with an emphasis of respect. The doctor gave his evidence; the cook gave hers; Marion was not asked to testify; I gave my evidence. The reporters were as busy as they could be. The jury and the spectators were gapingly intent, and sorry, when the evidence proved to be so short. With all its unusualness, the case was extraordinarily simple. The coroner began his address to the jury with an expression of sympathy with the husband. And then Harold jumped up with a hysterical, "Mr. Coroner, I beg to demand——" And instantly the court thrilled. "Who are you?" the coroner asked, suavely, noticing, with his flair, the man's condition. "I am the sole remaining representative of the deceased's family." The accident theory was poured, out, pell-mell, at white heat, and the priest did not escape. At first I was shocked, and angry. But the poor fellow could not help the explosion. No argument could convince his emotion. The unique event of his silent and monotonous existence had occurred, arousing swiftly his dormant passion for the repute of his family. An ideal blazed within him. In his brief madness he was heroic. Impossible not to respect his fervour! He would fain reduce the grandiose and fatal

act of Inez to the level of a paltry mishap. He lacked imagination!… And yet had he not imagination, narrow but intense?

The sardonic curl of the doctor's lip, during Harold's painful rhapsody, was surpassingly cruel.

The coroner summed up Harold infallibly and immediately. He soothed him, with firm tact, flattering him slightly by a few questions, and then turned again to the jury. In five minutes the verdict was given. I wanted to fly. But the coroner's officer had me in his grasp. The doctor went; the servants went; two reporters went; half the spectators went; I, listening to other cases, had to remain for the fulfilment of formalities, and Harold stayed with me. At last, I received the paper which authorised me to bury out of sight that which Inez had abandoned. I left the mean and undignified court and the overworked coroner, and breathed the fine air of the street. I thought with relief that all was over then. But Harold, sticking to my side, began to discuss the funeral. He was intensely interested in the details of the funeral. I asked him to come home with me in my cab; I could do no less. Before we reached the Mansions we saw the placard of an evening paper: "West End Suicide. Strange Story. Scene at Inquest." And in the Square itself we saw another placard: "Inquest on a well-known lady in the West End." Astounding that I should feel momentarily flattered because Inez, being my wife, was therefore 'well-known.' Yet I did. Harold, while inveighing against the prying sensationalism of the press, was secretly delighted by all this publicity.

The priest was in the hall of the Mansions, waiting to ascend in the lift. The encounter between him and Harold was extremely distressing for me; not because it was violent—the priest had an ample fund of diplomacy— but because I felt responsible for Harold's behaviour. I could not disown him as a brother-in-law. The priest had come to see me; but the hazard which caused him to see Harold in seeing me was positively malign. The presence of the lift-boy imposed silence in the lift. At my door, Marion, aproned and capped as though she had never left the flat, received us with ceremony. I took the visitors to my study. The priest said that he wished to see me alone. Harold objected that, as the priest's visit could have only one purpose, he had a right to be present at the interview. I was obliged to support the man. The priest had come to inquire as to the funeral; he assumed naturally that I should bury my

wife according to the ordinances of her religion. Harold resented the interment of a member of his family with Roman rites. I could not tell either of them that I did not expect to bury Inez. I could not tell them that they might bury the residue which she had quitted how they chose, for aught I cared. I wondered if she was still in the study, watching our radiant forms.

Mary entered. She had heard some uproar of voices and meant to intervene for my bodily health. She candidly detested Harold. She could not discern the idealist in him. She said that as Inez had died a Roman Catholic, as a Roman Catholic she ought to be buried, unless I preferred a purely civil funeral. It would have been difficult to decide whether Harold or the priest was the more finely lashed by her tone. I told the priest that he might preside at the funeral. Harold was thunderstruck. He departed, pale with shame and ire, and saying loudly that he should not attend the funeral. When he was gone the priest suitably regretted the incident. But in the evening, Harold returned, repentant, ready to abase himself in order to gain some share in the direction of the funeral. It was an emotional experience of which his soul refused to be deprived. His instinct was towards magnificence in the funeral. We did not quarrel, but we spent together an evening and a day of deplorable tedium for me. He fought for his ideal inch by inch, and the ultimate treaty was not entirely unfavourable to his valour. In the execution of it he was unimaginably active and urgent. I laughed to myself. Yet I sympathised with him. The tension of his life in those brief days must have been terrible, an awful and dangerous pleasure to him. He and I went alone to the funeral. At the chapel of the cemetery the priest met us, all blowing in the July breeze. More formalities! But by the mere efflux of time, it seemed, the coffin lowered itself into the hole in the ground. And Harold gave a last look at Inez. It was Inez herself that Harold had seen nailed up in the coffin.... His adieu to the priest was a master piece of icy fire.

"Good-by for the present," I said to him at the gates, and hailed a cab.

"But aren't we going back in the coach?" he murmured, aghast.

I answered as gently as I could:

"No, my dear fellow."

Later in the afternoon an emissary of the funeral furnishers came to the flat to inquire if everything had been done to my satisfaction. The incident of the cab had apparently caused disquiet.

"I suppose you haven't got the account with you?" I asked him.

But he had, by a fortunate chance.

I wrote a cheque and paid him, and myself conducted him to the door.

The incubus, the dead weight, of that which Inez had abandoned rolled off me. I was free to think of her. I was happy, by myself in my study, after Mary had gone home to her child.

Chapter XXXVI: Marion

At breakfast, I had the newspapers, a couple of second-hand catalogues of books, and a few letters of condolence. (Not a word nor a sign yet from John Hulse.) I read the letters, noting with detachment the difficulty of writing a letter of condolence well, and the rareness of success in this task. I did not open the book-catalogues. I glanced at a newspaper, page by page, and the effect was just as if it had been printed in one of those foreign languages which once I had learned so easily, but of which now I had no knowledge. Nothing in it made an impression on me, not even a title. My mind was away, wandering at its pleasure, heedless of control.

Could my friends have seen me there, sitting alone at breakfast in a room that was not a bachelor's room, with a square yard of empty white table-cloth stretching beyond the rampart of breakfast things, on the morning after my wife's funeral, they would have pitied me for a pathetic figure worthy of compassion; Yet I was not unhappy. I may have been pensive, but I was not unhappy. Indeed, I was conscious of a certain grave happiness. My solitude did not render me disconsolate. I was no longer prostrated by the shattering of the amorous enterprise which had possessed me when Inez avowed her relations with John Hulse. I had no sensation whatever of despair. And on the surfaces of my mind I had many pleasurable sensations. The splendid weather pleased me. The beauty and order and silence of the room pleased me. The geometrically regular creases in the damask table-cloth pleased me. The food pleased me. I was gladdened by the sure increase of strength in my body, the return of physical power. That body had once seemed horribly

gross, heavy, and unresponsive to me. But, though I regretted lost freedoms, I did not feel imprisoned in my body. And I wondered, not at its incapacity, but at its power and skill.

I did not mourn for Inez. The death of Inez caused me no sorrow, neither joy. The drama of her life, and the swift circumstances of her departure, seemed to me to be fine. All our lives had been wrong with a fundamental and inclusive blindness. But hers, viewed complete, had the harmonious contours and the homogeneity of a work of art. It had been splendid in its blindness, in the violence of its intensity throughout, in its abandonment to instinct. Her secret revolt during the years of genteel poverty had a quality of continuous hidden violence that was heroic for me. She had lived for the fallacy of desire, but she had lived. And her death was of a piece with her life. All the desolating tedium of her inquest and funeral rounded off the tale. I saw that tedium now as torture, but as exquisite torture. I gave myself to it again, in retrospect, as to a sweet pain. And how could it have been rendered less tedious? It could not have been rendered less tedious. The appalling and exasperating weariness of those formalities was inherent in the ideals of the very race itself. And now they were finished; they were over. That which Inez had quitted was definitely bestowed. I sympathised with, I deeply understood, every person with whom those formalities had forced me into contact.... Three days, and by chafing I had lengthened three days into a century! Had I to live them again I would yield myself to them utterly as to the water of a tide; I would live in them minute by minute, with divine indifference.

If I had an inquietude, it was not caused by Inez's death, but by my tingling consciousness of the fact that she was alive. Where was she now? Into what errors was her radiant tissue of desire leading her? What false paradise was she beginning to construct? Absurdly, I felt that if, with my experience, I could only speak to her for an instant, I might save her from ages of futile illusion! All I could do was to think of her, to think towards her. This I did, returning constantly to the exercise with joy, and picturing in my fancy the thoughts flying to her, invisible to my gross vision, but substantial to hers! Warning, succouring thoughts that streamed to her! The convinced sense of this seeming-miraculous one-sided communication made me happy. Happiness must have been apparent in my eyes.

So that when Marion came into the room I tried to modify my expression, from a wish not to wound or puzzle her. It was as if I had been ashamed of my feelings. I stared at the paper, frowning. I had not rung for Marion. It appeared that she had entered in order to satisfy herself that I was not incapable of putting food into my mouth or of demanding anything that I might happen to need. She went behind me to the sideboard.

"Shall I get your cigarettes, sir?"

"No, thanks," I said. "You can clear the table,"

I rose and glanced out of the window.

When she had removed from the cloth everything but my letters and papers, she suddenly stopped in her work and turned her spectacles upon me.

"May I speak to you, sir?" She coughed.

"Certainly," I said. "What is it?" Her deference embarrassed me.

"I only wanted to know if you could tell me whether you thought of keeping on your present establishment or not, sir.... now! I don't like troubling you, but I thought you might be making your arrangements. I've had an offer of a very good situation at Oxford, and I thought if you were thinking of giving me notice soon—— If you understand me, sir.... Sorry as I am to intrude."

"You must do exactly what you think best for yourself, Marion," I said cordially. I avoided the tone of a master to a servant, and spoke with easy good-humour, partly natural and partly affected.

"It isn't that I wish to leave here, sir. Not at all!" she replied in her trained voice of servility, apparently not perceiving my advance toward fellowship, or ignoring it. "But I was thinking it would be a pity to refuse this place at Oxford if——"

"I don't want to change anything here," I said.

"Thank you, sir. May I tell cook the same?"

"Yes."

There was no sign of satisfaction nor of dissatisfaction in her face or gestures. She proceeded with her operations. I sat down near the window.

"I suppose you know what a woman like you ought to do?" I ventured.

"No, sir."

"You ought to get married, instead of remaining a parlourmaid." I adopted a curt geniality. It was a clumsy effort to break down the barrier separating us, but it was an effort.

"I'm not one to marry, sir," she replied.

On the surface she was inflexible in her servility. But I had stirred something profound in her that she could not control. She flushed. Her voice shook in the fervour of its sincerity. I felt that I ought to apologise to her. I felt that I ought to ask this woman to sit down while I apologised, and that at least I ought to rise. I guessed now what had happened within the last few days. The object of her desire must have promised himself to the other woman who more purely desired him. The odd-job-man, declining a parlourmaid, had betrothed himself to a prison-wardress. Fate had gone against Marion. A tragedy had enacted behind those spectacles, and her romance was over. She had loved beneath her, and had lost. That was why she was ready to leave London, why she was perhaps anxious to leave the Mansions. I understood now the reason of her tremendous preoccupation with the man on the night of my seizure—a preoccupation so powerful that it had wrenched her thoughts completely away even from my supposed death. The decisive moment had been approaching then, and she had known it. She had known that within a brief space the man's action would confer upon her either bliss or misery. It had conferred misery, and, henceforth, 'she was not one to marry.'

And all that she hid from me under her relentless servility.

I could not fight successfully against her servility. I could not ask her to sit. I could not rise. I could not apologise. But I could regard her in the inviolable field of my own mind as a fellow-creature—not academically, but really, passionately. I could sympathise with her in the abrupt drama of her existence. My understanding thoughts went to her.

The conception of all Marion's past and of all her future awed me as I invited it. She, too, had been where I had been. She, too, had been cut off from humanity! She, too, had made the discovery of the radiant form! She, too, had constructed paradises and witnessed their dissolution! She, too, had awakened to freedom, and seen the revealing vision in the uncoloured light. She, too, had watched universes winking in and out until the tale receded into the supremest heights of coalescence, where personal memory expired, where outer indivi-

dualities are sloughed and new ones assumed. Only she did not know. She could not know, at this stage of her eternity. (I knew solely by virtue of the accident which had thrown me back into the envelopes which I had cast.) She was from everlasting to everlasting. In her cap and apron she was from everlasting to everlasting. Our exterior relations were fantastically absurd, with her servility and my incurable air of a master.... A divine radiance asking permission of its fellow to speak! Yes, fantastically absurd, but scarcely to be modified save within the secret mind! Within the secret mind I raised her where she could not mount. I dwelt on the grandeur of her long history; I carried her on from where she stood to the sublime threshold of her ultimate destiny and return to perfection; until I was steeped in an ineffable marvelling.

All else seemed to fail in importance against this secret realisation of what I was and what others were, and of the unique joy of sympathetic comprehension tending towards unity.

Marion primly shut the door, but not on my thoughts, which followed her though she knew it not.

Chapter XXXVII: Edith

I went into my study and sat down at the desk. It was covered with letters and unopened packets in disorder, the collection of such a week as perhaps not many human beings have passed through. Once or twice during the previous day or two I had written briefly at the desk—for example, I had made out a check there for the expenses of the funeral—but I had scribbled standing, as at a passover, as a man will when his existence is upheaved, indifferently lodging my paper on the topmost layer of the accumulation. The law against deranging the contents of my desk had retained its sanction throughout all those events. I knew, on that morning after the funeral, that I must resume or recommence my life, and though I had no plan, no central idea for activity, I knew that the preliminary of any scheme would be the purgation of my desk. And I set leisurely about it.

Delving, I came to a prescription of the doctor's, stamped and numbered by the chemist who had made it up. I could not recall when he had written it, nor decide whether it was for Inez or for me. He might have written it on the night of my angina pectoris, as I lay in delirium.... All that was like history now, and the doctor himself had receded

temporarily into history. In a day I had nearly forgotten him. He had assisted intimately and vitally at great crises of my existence, he had probably saved my life, he knew the nakedness of my instincts,—and already I had put him away into a closed cupboard of my memory. He had come, and he had gone.

At length I arrived at the lowest stratum, the writing-pad, with the weekly date-block a week in arrear. I tore off the leaf. Scattered over the blotting-paper were a number of little round marks. They were the marks of the tears which Inez had shed as she sat at the desk after her confession to me. I had watched those tears fall one by one from her cheeks, and there they were faintly preserved in the blotting-paper. Across the blotting paper, too, was the record of Inez's large, careless handwriting. She had written, then, at my desk. With a paper knife I detached the upper sheet of blotting paper and held it reversed to the light. There were two of Inez's writings on it, one across the other—telegrams. One was addressed to my sister and ran: "Come instantly, very serious, Morrice—" then two words that had not blotted—"Inez." The other was clearer: "Realism, London. Shall not come. Inez." It was one of John Hulse's caprices to have a registered telegraphic address, and 'realism' was the word he had chosen for it, characteristically. Inez had sent off that telegram early on the morning when she supposed me to be dead. She had not told him that I was dead. She had not deigned to tell him that I was dead; or she had not known how to frame the message. She had confined herself to the essential. Doubtless it was upon the receipt of this telegram that John Hulse, furious against the instability of women, had fled suddenly in disgust, to Paris or somewhere, to rearrange his plans. And he had not returned. As yet he probably knew nothing, unless he had seen the English papers.

I held the historical document in my hand, hesitatingly. Then I tore it up into small pieces and dropped it, quietly, into the waste-paper basket. I could not have kept it. Had I kept it I should have deemed myself guilty of a repugnant sentimentality. And perhaps it was too sacred to keep.

I mused a long time on history. Although it was my pride to regard history with the large magnanimous calm of a philosopher, I was shaken by the unexpected revelation of that document. I could not analyse my

feelings. Let us say merely that I was conscious of an exceeding strange emotion.

And then the door leading from the drawing-room was cautiously opened, and I saw the smiling, rather roguish face of a woman in a large, black hat, and under that face the smiling serious face of a little girl. They were peeping at me. Their playful intention had been to startle the solitary man in his study, and they had succeeded.

"I've brought Edith to see you," said Mary.

Holding my niece's hand she came into the room.

To see these two together, especially in panoply, was a moving sight. Mary gazed on her offspring with a passionate and proud affection which no reserve of demeanour could hide. It had always seemed strange, piquant, to me that my sister should be a mother like other women, and that she should have passed through a great tragedy of her own. My sister always seemed to me to be, not a grown-up woman, but the girl that I had known as a youth, brilliantly imitating a grown-up woman in appearance, gesture, and wisdom. There were moments when her face had the expression of a girl's, and not at all of a mother's, of a widow's. And just now, as she gazed at her child, it had the expression of a girl's and of a mother's, too. It was young, and yet it was old. It was innocent and yet it was experienced, disillusioned, and ironic. It had in it everything.

Whenever she was with her child the glance of her eye and the gestures of her body appeared to be saying: "I am a sensible mother. I do not deceive myself about Edith. I am not silly about her. I treat her with firmness. I exact obedience. I am not a slave to her. I do not consider her to be the most marvellous child that was ever born. I merely do my best to bring her up properly and to keep her in good health. I am absolutely impartial concerning her. The last thing I wish is to weary people with her.... Still, you will probably admit of your own accord that she does genuinely differ from the ordinary."

You looked at Edith and, if you could see, you saw a miracle.... A delicate plant, and Mary, by the long miracle of expert knowledge, watchfulness, self-control and perseverance, was flowering it in perfection. The contour of those cheeks, the exquisite bloom on them, — these were not Mary's creation, but she had evolved them; their flawlessness was her creation. The white frock, cap, stockings, shoes,

gloves—in every incredibly meticulous detail you could discern Mary and her maternal passion. The article was finished, in every way finished. The article represented years of the activity of a first-class brain and of a terrible affection. It was put forward, with superficial negligence, as being a trifle, a mere female infant conscientiously cared for, such as exists in tens of thousands all over England. But in the slight involuntary trembling of the head of the mother, in the lifting of that head, in the proud dart from the mother's eye, there was a supreme challenge. It was as if Mary had cried aloud:

"There!… Can you match it?"

Edith, without instructions, came primly forward to me, walking just as though she were a procession, and raised her mouth to kiss my cheek. She had, I knew, been taught never to kiss anybody on the mouth except her mother.

"Good morning, uncle."

She stared at me curiously, wonderingly.

"Good morning, Edith."

I lifted my eyebrows as high as I could, in a question, and stuck out my knee, glancing at it.

She smiled and nodded assent, and then I perched her on my knee, and she smoothed her frock, and sighed, looking round the room. In another moment, a contraction of the muscles drawing her thighs into line with her back warned me that she had had enough of my knee. She slipped down, and leaned against it, folding her arms like an old woman. That fluffy cocoon of linen and lace was between my knees, and I could detect the faint, fine colour of a new frock and of clean warm flesh. Both Mary and I looked at her. She was quite accustomed to being looked at. In spite of her mother's despotism and frigid impartiality, she knew that she was the centre of the world and the most important thing in it. Her mother's stupendous and to her often tiresome particularity in all that concerned her was a subtle and intense flattery to her.

"I was thinking," said Mary. "You wouldn't mind me leaving her here this morning while I go and do some errands."

She said it with an offhand air, simulated. A prevarication, of course! Mary had brought Edith with the sole aim of distracting me. She had been saying to herself: "It would be a good thing for him to have Edith

for a while. It would take him out of himself." And she had determined to accord me the incomparable toy, the toy beyond rubies.

"The point is," I said. "Whether we can trust mother to go out alone, isn't it, Edith?"

"Yes," she agreed, smiling confidentially at her mother as if to say: "We must humour this clown, because we like him."

As soon as Marion had been summoned and we had arranged that mother and daughter should lunch with me, Mary prepared to depart.

"Aren't you going to take your hat and gloves off, Edith, or do you prefer to keep them on?" the mother enquired.

"Can I go into uncle's bedroom?" Edith asked.

"Why, of course!" I said, "There are several glasses."

"Better kiss me before you go," said her mother.

"There's no knowing how long you'll be, and I can't wait."

They kissed. No injunction from the mother to the child to be good, no specific behests or prohibitions! Another of Mary's fads was never to train her child in public. Edith went toward the little door, raised her arm to turn the knob, turned it with difficulty, and vanished, shutting the door behind her, to remove her street attire.

"There was one thing I thought of," said Mary, as soon as we were alone, with the change of voice that the departure of a child always brings about. "I thought I'd better mention it to you at once. Would you like me to go through Inez's things for you? Or would you prefer to do that yourself? It won't do to leave them about indefinitely, will it?"

The immediate propriety of this task had not occurred to me.

"I wish you would," I said.

"Of course you'll keep the jewellery?" she said.

"Yes," I said.

We could neither of us speak in natural tones.

I followed Mary out of the room to the vestibule. There we encountered the cook, who, excited about the lunch, was anxious to learn exactly what Miss Edith might and would eat. A considerable discussion ensued, fostered by the cook. The cook kept protesting that not for the whole world would she have anything happen to Miss Edith, through her agency, in the way of indigestion. Seeing that Mary scarcely ever brought Edith to London, it was highly perspicuous of the cook to have divined that Edith was in fact the centre of the world.

When I went back to the study I discovered Edith sliding down from a chair in front of a dwarf bookcase. The top of this bookcase was the appointed place of my crimson Bernard-Moore vase. The vase now lay on the carpet, in three pieces.

"I don't know what mother will say!" Edith murmured, smoothing her frock again, and glancing at me. Her face was flushed. "You know, I'm always climbing, and mother can't understand it, and I'm sure I can't!"

"Perhaps the vase fell off by itself," I said. "Vases sometimes do, especially red vases."

"Oh, no!" she assured me. "I got on to the chair and knocked against it, and off it fell. I nearly-nearly caught it, but vases are so slippery."

"What did you get on the chair for?"

"So that I could see on to the top of the bookcase. Mother says she's afraid I shall be a mountaineer."

"What is a mountaineer?"

"Oh! Uncle! Don't you know 'Excelsior?' I do. 'A banner with the strange device.' That's a mountaineer. Only mother says they never go up at night. They always start before breakfast, before even the gas-lamps are turned out. So it is night after all, but backward. I don't know what mother will say."

"Will she be angry?"

"Oh! no! She's never angry. She reasons with me. I wish she would be angry. When she reasons with me it's awful. It makes me so ashamed. Then she asks me whether I don't think I ought to do something to myself to make me remember. And of course, I say I ought, because I *ought*. Then I have to think of something that I can do to myself. So mother doesn't punish me, I punish myself. Mother says in the end we always punish ourselves when we go against reason. And it's very difficult."

"What is?"

"Punishing myself. Sometimes I feel afterwards somehow as if I'd punished myself too hard, and sometimes not hard enough. I know how I shall have to punish myself for this. I'm invited to a garden-party to-morrow afternoon, and I shall have to punish myself by not going. I can't see anything else for it. And I did want to go, because there'll be ices. And I can only have ices when I'm out. Mother says ices are quite against

reason, but when I'm out I can have a little one, because it's not nice to seem peculiar in your ways."

"Well," I said, "if I were you I shouldn't breathe a word about this vase business to any one."

"Not to mother?"

"No."

"But I must. I've broken it."

"Well! It's my vase. Suppose I thank you for breaking it? Suppose I wanted it broken?"

"But I was climbing up things. No sooner had I got into the room, than I began climbing up things! And I'm always doing it, away from home. I don't do it much at home because I've been up nearly everything at home, and I know what's on the top of everything."

"And supposing I say that I like you to climb up? Supposing I tell you that curiosity is a great virtue?"

"Is it?"

"Yes"

"I shall *have* to tell mother. So it's no use."

"It seems to me that you don't care twopence what I think. It's only what your mother thinks that you care about. After all, it's my vase you've broken, not your mother's. If I'd been sorry about it, you would have had to apologise to me and said how sorry *you* were and all that sort of thing. But as I'm glad, and as I don't want any fuss made, and as I like you to have an ice now and then, and as I'm not very well and have to be humoured—I think I ought to be allowed to decide what's going to happen. Besides, you're an independent human being, aren't you?"

"That's what mother often says."

"And I'm a great deal older than your mother."

There was a pause.

"I shall have to tell mother."

"Very well, then," I yielded. "But let's pick up the pieces."

I bent down to pick up the pieces. But Edith did not follow me. When I looked at her again, I saw her lower lip dropping, dropping, and all the curves of her face developing angles. She was in the gravest danger of tears. And I had not suspected it. I had thought that she had been arguing the point of conduct with a complete absence of emotion. The threatened fit of crying seemed like a catastrophe to me. And it was

perilously imminent. I dropped the pieces of vase on to a table, and took Edith in my arms and sat down with her in the easy-chair, and tried to soothe her grief. I had her close to me. Her head was on my waistcoat, and her bared little legs sprawling over mine, and her hair about my chin. I could feel her heart beating, and the thrill of her body. I could feel a sob gathering within her to burst. I murmured to her.... It was the narrowest escape. A trifle, a nothing, and she would have wept violently! But the storm edged off. After a few moments she gazed up at me with a melancholy smile. I had an extraordinary and exquisite sense of intimacy with her.

"Perhaps I needn't tell mother," she whispered.

"Well," I said. "I don't want to over-persuade you. You do as you like. But if I were you, I should say nothing about it."

"And it *is* very hot weather, isn't it?"

"What's that got to do with it?"

"It's so what I call icy weather."

"You're right," I said. "It's very icy weather."

Later she said:

"Well, that's over! But you know, uncle, you're only pretending you don't care for that vase."

"I'm not saying it wasn't a decent sort of vase," I replied.

"Was it *hers*?" she asked in an awed voice.

"Whose?"

"Auntie's." In a still lower tone.

"No."

"There I go again!" said Edith. "Mother said I was not to say anything to you at all about Auntie. But I really couldn't help that. If it had been Auntie's vase I think I *should* have had to tell mother, then. So I was bound to know.... Then why were you so fond of it?"

"I'll tell you why I was fond of it. And you mustn't tell, anybody."

"Not mother?"

"No. Not mother. I was once in this room when everything melted away except that vase. There was nothing except that vase, sticking up by itself out of nothing."

"But weren't you dreaming, uncle?"

"No, I wasn't dreaming."

"Did you pinch yourself to make sure you weren't dreaming?"

"No. But I knew I wasn't."

She reflected.

"I suppose things do happen like that sometimes," she said calmly. "I've always thought everything was very queer."

We were silent. We said no more on that subject. Never since have I mentioned that subject to anybody. And were I to mention it I should never perhaps get a response so startling and so satisfactory as Edith's.

I suggested to her the wisdom of hiding the vase, and she agreed. Standing on tiptoe, I gently dropped the pieces one after another, behind the cornice of my highest bookcase.

"I wish I was as tall as you, uncle," she said. "Then I should never have to climb, and mother would be ever so much happier. But I suppose it wouldn't do for me to be taller than mother."

"Now I think I shall write a letter for another vase," I said. "But I shan't tell the man that this one is broken. Because he's a genius and he never makes two alike, and he hates to hear of them being broken."

"Do they cost a lot?"

"No. About two or three pounds. The Chinese used to make them thousands of years ago, and then nobody was able to make them any more till this man found out how to make them, because he's a genius."

"I wish you hadn't told me all that, uncle."

"Why?"

"It makes me begin to feel sorry again.... Uncle!"

"Well?"

"As I've mentioned her once, I suppose I might as well mention her again. Auntie used to give me a chocolate when mother brought me to see her. And it's such a long time since I was here. Perhaps if I could have a chocolate it would do my sorryness good."

"Next time," I said. For I was actually without this necessary of life.

"I think I know where Auntie used to keep them," she insinuated.

And as a fact she did know. She found a provision of chocolates in a lacquer box in the drawing-room. And I had never known that there were chocolates in that lacquered box. I passed the whole morning in making the acquaintance of Edith. She had visited me before, and I had visited her. But it was six months since I had seen her, an in that time a new Edith had supplanted the old one.

A very dramatic thing happened when Mary returned, for lunch. Edith and I, after touring round most of the flat, were back in the study. Mary entered, hot and hurried, and with a self-conscious mien. She kissed her daughter absently, negligently, and walked almost straight across the room towards the dwarf bookcase from which the vase had toppled.

"Why!" she exclaimed. "What have you done with your *rouge flambé* vase?"

It was just one of those sinister coincidences which victimise children, rendering earth an impossible habitation for them. I dared not look at Edith, but I knew that she must be reddening. I felt that all depended on my courage and tact.

"Oh!" I answered. "I've been rearranging things. I've put it on the top of a bookcase."

Happily she did not inquire further. I perceived that she was very preoccupied.

"Captain Hulse is back in town," she said the next moment. She flushed. She could not speak his name, the impassible Mary, without flushing! I too, was confused, but not for the same reason as she.

"Have you seen him?" I asked.

"No. But I've been telephoning to him at the Club. He'd sent a note for me there. He only got back this morning,—and found both the letters I'd written to him. It must have been a fearful shock for him, of course! He's coming to see you this afternoon or to-night."

There stood Edith, looking at me, conscious that events had with grievous suddenness lessened her importance to me.

Chapter XXXVIII: Johnnie's Return

That afternoon I sat in my study, engaged in nothing but thought. I had not as yet found interest again in any kind of work. The occupations of my brain were Inez and, after her, the beings by whom I was surrounded. My concerned curiosity about the ordeals of Inez, and the fresh piquancy of regarding my fellow-creatures as immortals passing through a phase of eclipse,—I had in this matter and this experience, more than enough to make the minutes fly. You may say I had always known that death must bring strange ordeals in its train; you may say that I had always known that my fellow-creatures must be in one sense or another

immortal, that at least the stuff of them was uncreated and indestructible. Yes, it is true that I had always known. But it is also true that I had never realised. The realisation pleasurably animated every instant of my day. My thoughts hovered eagerly round it as the thoughts of a man of genius will hover round the discovery which he has made. All my senses were titillated, as when one is seeing a foreign country for the first time.

Mary, before setting out in the morning, had said that she could not stay after lunch. But later she had changed her mind. And now she was employed in the bedroom, going through all Inez' things and deciding for me what was to happen to them. Marion was helping her. Edith slumbered in the dining room. The child could not have slept in the bedroom without completely stopping her mother's work, and Mary would not allow her to monopolise the drawing-room. Mary had two principles in the care of her daughter: Edith must never inconvenience others, and Edith must always be perfectly tended. The war of these two opposing principles sometimes caused difficulties that only Mary's brain could solve. The lunch-table had to be cleared very quickly, and the dining-room cleansed of the odours of food by Mary's own process of ventilation. Two armchairs had to be placed front to front, and a shawl stretched over their seats. Then Edith had to be lifted into this pen out of which the accidents of sleep could not tumble her; and she had to be covered, neither too lightly nor too heavily. That Edith would duly sleep in this peculiar contrivance and these unfamiliar surroundings, seemed to be axiomatic in the minds of both Mary and Edith. Edith smiled at us in farewell, and the doors of the dining-room were closed on her; and Mary assured everybody that the ordinary existence of the flat might and must proceed as usual, with no precautions whatever of silence, as Edith's faculty of sleep had been trained to ignore all noises exterior to the room in which she actually was. Nevertheless the flat was hushed. Edith slumbered. Edith was taking the rest which was essential to the perfect development of a young child. This fact coloured the consciousness of all. More, it produced a solemn joy in the flat, where no child had lived.

I thought of the placid and sad activities of the women, and of the slumber of the young child; and the thought was happiness.

Then I heard vague sounds, signs of disturbance of the current of our existence. And then talking in the drawing-room. I could not mistake that voice. It was the magnificent and rich voice of John Hulse. He had come, then! I did not doubt that it was for this Mary had stayed.

I shook with excitement, with apprehension. The image of John Hulse, which had been chained and hidden by force at the back of my mind, leaped forward like a beast into an arena, scattering everything. He had come, to pay his visit. He had dared the adventure. He was bound to come. Convention compelled him to come. He had not dared to stay away.... I was the outraged husband, he the virtual adulterer. Chance alone had prevented the consummation of the injury against me. Here was the man who had made a rendezvous with my wife in my drawing-room after dining with me. I had to meet him. I might have written to him and so prevented the meeting. I might have told my secret to Mary, and so prevented the meeting; but I had done nothing. If I followed social precedent, any but formal and brief intercourse between us was impossible. If I followed social precedent I should indicate to him, by a glance, a tone, or a horsewhip, that I was aware of my misfortune and of his share in it; and he would quit the flat at once, never to re-enter it. And I should stand in the midst of my hearthrug with anger sated.

But I could not feel a genuine anger. Something base in me tried to summon up a genuine anger, and failed. I could not be at once resentful against him and honest with myself.... 'What! Love your enemies by all means, but love the man who has tried to seduce your wife? Monstrous!' I am on what is termed dangerous ground here. But I am indifferent because I feel so secure. The deepest feeling in me was one of sympathy with John Hulse. Call it monstrous. It may be monstrous that the deepest feeling in me was one of sympathy with John Hulse; but it is true. I understood him so well; I understood Inez so well. I could see the germination of the sentiment between them. An inflection from her, a glance from him, and it was born! They both ignored it at first, but there it was, growing. From ignoring it, they came to smiling at it. Then it tempted them. It tempted Inez more than John Hulse. She more than Johnnie fed it with the strengthening food of reflection. I could hear her words, uttered to me in the room where I was: *I've stood it too long.... getting up in the morning with the feeling that no man was thinking about*

me.... that no man was happy or unhappy because of me.... How many years have I stood that?… These words, or words to that effect! The original fault was mine. My enormous egoism had brought it about. I had not been clever enough even to divine my wife's habitual thoughts on getting up in a morning! And the words of Inez which above all others sounded in my ears were the slashing, wounding phrase: *It was just like you!* A phrase spoken under a misapprehension, a phrase entirely unjust as she meant it; but how terribly indicative of the attitude of mind toward me which my bland conduct had induced in her! How expressive of the secret bitterness with which my attitude toward her had impregnated her love for me! For she had loved me. The abandonment of her outburst when she had flung herself on my lifeless body was proof enough that throughout her relations with Johnnie Hulse she had loved me. It was my intellectual pride and the ferocity of my artistic egoism that, after desolating her, had pricked her into the arms of Johnnie Hulse.... I knew the arguments which she would use to excuse herself to herself, and the arguments which he would use. I could appreciate their seductive plausibility.... After all (they would say) why not? It can't hurt *him*. It's nobody's concern but ours! It's nothing!… And so the sentiment kept on growing, until it commanded and was imperious; and perhaps it frightened and fascinated Inez.

I knew so well what Hulse would be saying to himself that it was as if I had actually been Hulse. How he would conquer his first distaste for the caprice by what he would call the 'de-sentimentalisation' of it, the stripping from it of all conventional preconceptions!… I knew his immense conviction that in love there was only one crime—the crime of indiscretion. I knew the terrific force of habit upon him. I knew the certainty in him that he was acting justifiably for the happiness of himself and of Inez, and that his one duty to me in the matter was to deceive me with adequate skill. I knew that he was perfectly capable of deceiving me while retaining all his affection for me. I knew that the constant tendency of hypocrisy is to deny the capacity of the human heart to respond to opposing feelings simultaneously.

Inez and John Hulse, these two also were the blind and pathetic victims of desire, as I had been. And was I to curse and wither the survivor in the affected attitudes of Victorian tragedy?… John Hulse, from everlasting to everlasting, imprisoned for a moment in a radiant

envelope of illusion, and that envelope attached to a gross body of still more fantastic illusion; and the episode with Inez a capricious error of the gross body, a sin far more against John Hulse than against me, and at most a moment within a trifling moment of eternity! A misfortune for him, not a crime! And neither a misfortune nor a crime, but a nothing— nothing in the vast and majestic evolution of the divine particle that named itself, just now, John Hulse! I, with my acquired perspective, could only ignore the negligible transient vagary of the flesh that for a moment impeded John Hulse's true consciousness of himself.

And yet, while I reasoned thus, my hand trembled at the prospect of having to meet Johnnie Hulse, for I doubted whether I possessed sufficient force to triumph, in practice, against convention. And I guessed that he, too, was apprehending the interview with fear, was wondering anxiously whether Inez had confessed to me before she died, was consoling himself with the reflection that at any rate it would be best to get the interview over, for good or for evil. And the appreciation of his state increased my nervousness. So that I could not bring myself to rise and go into the drawing-room. He was talking to Mary even more loudly than usual,— evidence that he was indeed nervous and excited. I must go to him. If I did not go to him, Mary, totally unaware of the two dramas hidden on either side of her, would be coming to fetch me.

I arrived at the door between the two rooms, my fingers on the knob. Involuntarily I made the knob click I was bound to enter then, and I did enter, suddenly.

He stood on the hearthrug, in his familiar favourite posture, with his hands behind him, listening to something that Mary was saying about our doctor. He wore a light travelling suit, as if he had just arrived from beneath the suns of a scorching climate. But his face was rather pale. He turned at my entry, and Mary ceased speaking. Our eyes met. My throat was so strangely dry that I could not articulate a word. He hesitated, and then, approaching me, he held out his hand. His features showed the uncertainty of his thoughts.

"Well, old man," he exclaimed. "I'm back, you see!"

His hand seized mine. I said to myself: "Unless I can control myself better than this, he will guess that Inez confessed to me, and everything will be finished between us." Then a happy instinct prompted me to press his hand strongly. He was reassured. Both he and Mary imagined

that my emotion was merely that of the widower, meeting for the first time after bereavement, his close friend and the friend of his wife. The mistake was natural. I sat down. The worst of the ordeal was over.

Chapter XXXIX: The Lover and the Mother

"Well, Johnnie," I said, "what's the meaning of this mysterious disappearance?"

I put the question to him almost innocently, almost as though I was not perfectly aware of the origin of his flight. Even to myself I played the man who knew nothing.

"I had to go off to Paris to see Durand-Ruel," he replied, quite at ease. "I had the letter at nine, and I caught the ten-o'clock train."

"Not like you to be up so early as all that!" I said.

The 'letter' which he had received was, of course, Inez' telegram.

"And when I was once there, I didn't see the point of coming back. The fact is, I went down to the Café des Lilas, and found a new lot there, naturally! Infants, most of them! Simple infants! Of course I had to go to the Bal Bullier. You're always hearing people say that the Bal Bullier is nothing to what it used to be. Rubbish! It always was half sham and half real. It's just as fine as ever it was. The band is just as loud and the beer is just as poisonous. The girls and boys throw themselves into the dancing with just the same frenzy as ever, and the hips of the girls have just the same vulgar agreeable swing. Only there are more lights, and the fireworks are infinitely better. But you never were allowed to take your walking-stick into the hall, and you aren't now. The Bullier hasn't changed, except for the better. It's we that have changed. I met old Lazarus there—you know, Conduit Street—sighing that the old days were gone, etc. I told him straight that he made me simply ill. I told him he looked like a crow and that he ought to have been one. Some of those fellows will almost thank you for insulting them.... I thought it wouldn't do me any harm to have a few days at a big life-class. So I went to Calarossi's. Hadn't a thing with me, of course. But I called at old Lefebre-Foinet's in the Rue Vavin, and he fitted me up. Same as ever.... Told me that Slaxon, A.R.A., if you please, still owed him over two thousand francs for colours. But he seems to flourish on bad debts. He's made a fortune out of bad debts. He too began to talk to me about the dear, dead days beyond recall.... I don't know what people mean when they go

on like that. The fact is, people never do talk like that till their souls have died in their bodies. When you come near some of 'em you can sniff their decaying souls, positively."

"Really——" Mary protested.

"Yes, really!" he insisted, not excusing the violence of his imagery. "*I* can, anyway. I can tell you there wasn't much deadness down at Calarossi's. My poor friends, the vital smell on a hot evening! My poor friends, the heat! Models in the same poses! And the same atrocious jokes! The same appallingly bad work, and here and there a bit of slap-up! Same American virgins, talking neither French nor English! It did me good. And I learned something about what was going on—I mean really going on; not what you read in the *Gazette des Beaux Arts.* I lived at the Hôtel de la Place de l'Odéon, and ate either at the Tour d'Argent or Laperouse. After I'd done with Durand-Ruel, I assure you I never once re-crossed the river. Then all of a sudden I got sick of it, oh! so sick of it I couldn't stand it a minute longer! I don't know—it all seemed to me so—I don't know! I spent my last night at the Ritz, and went to the Marigny—I don't know why. That was only the night before last. I meant to have come home by the four o'clock train yesterday afternoon, but I fidgeted about too long and missed it. So I got to London this morning—and found your letters!"

With the last four words he glanced at Mary, and there was an extraordinary change in his voice. The change in his magnificent voice made Mary's eyes humid, and I could feel a swift tightness in the throat. Strange and powerful individuality! The most original, perhaps, I have ever known! Who could have guessed, from the passionate vehemence with which he threw out the description of his week in Paris, that within the previous few hours he had learned of the death, amid astounding circumstances, of the woman who was to have become his mistress? Who could have guessed that his mind had the slightest preoccupation. And yet in the tone of those four last words—'and found your letter'—he in a flash revealed the depths of a mine of feeling, moving us both. Not that he was regarding the dead woman as a lost mistress. No! He had rushed to Paris in order to enable himself to see that that affair of the heart was factitious and unworthy of its danger, and he had succeeded. He was regarding the dead woman as the heroic victim in his friend's tragedy; he was regarding her as a familiar, and as a human being. I had

perfectly convinced him that I knew nothing, and so his conscience was at rest, and there was no fear in his eyes when they met mine.

Mary, captured by the magic of his tone, by the tremendous life in him, and by his careless sincerity of expression, stared at him admiringly. She seemed to be quite unaware of herself. Unconsciously she leaned a little towards him from her chair, looking up at him, her lips somewhat parted. Her face glowed; her eyes sparkled. Even the least observant would have decided instantly: "That woman is in love with that man, and very much in love." Could she have seen herself she would have been very painfully shocked. She so correct, so reserved, so independent, so proud! She in mourning! She a mother! But she could not see herself. It was her blind and innocent unconsciousness that redeemed the crudeness of the situation, that made the situation fine. And after all she was not a mother, nor in mourning, nor jealous for the dignity of her sex. She was a vigorous and sane woman deeply in love.

"Tell me," said Johnnie Hulse. "I hope she didn't have to suffer a great deal."

He frowned. Possibly a more ordinary friend would have kept away from the great subject until later in the interview; or, having arrived at it by chance or by intention, would have been forced by tradition into expressions of sympathy or sorrow. But not Johnnie Hulse. He seemed to follow his thoughts heedless of us. And his frown was nearly menacing— as though, if Inez had suffered, he would be capable of accusing us. The spectacle of futile suffering generally led him to criticise savagely a being whom he considered to have been badly invented—the occidental God.

I shook my head, and answered quickly, before Mary could speak, to show that I could talk about Inez as calmly as anybody:

"She was too weak to suffer much."

"That's good!" he murmured. "That's good!"

There followed a silence, which he broke by asking Mary:

"How long did you say she survived?"

At the same moment the door from the dining-room was pushed open and Edith came in. She had wakened up from a long sleep—perhaps the voice of Johnnie Hulse had entered into her dreams—and had climbed out of her pen and blindly tottered, rather than walked, towards her mother. She was no longer the prim and precocious maiden,

but the little animal half-aroused. Her hair was tangled, her frock disarranged, and her delicious face still swollen and crimson with sleep. She rubbed her eyes with boyish fists, and looked on the ground. As she approached her mother, she threw her head back, to get the hair out of her blinking eyes, and smiled in a daze. Her mother took her, and kissed her, and with persuading fingers smoothed her outlines into some sort of drawing-room decency. And Edith bridled and yielded under the touches, smiling again when her mother expressed privately to her an acute surprise that a young woman so experienced in the ways of the world should enter her uncle's drawing-room in such a condition of dishevelment.

"This is my daughter, Edith," said Mary. "Edith, dear, will you go and shake hands with Captain Hulse, a friend of your uncle's and your mother's?"

These two had not met before. And apparently Edith was not anxious that they should meet now. She hung back, hesitating, reluctant. Johnnie made a step towards her, and waited. Some would doubtless urge that it was the infallible instinct of childhood that held her away from the man who was absorbing so much of her mother's affection. But a child's instinct is just as infallible as that of a dog—that is to say, it errs frequently. Mary bent down, whispering, and her hair touched Edith's, and edges of Edith's frock were lost in the folds of Mary's black dress. And then Edith detached herself, like a boat from a ship, and walked sedately across to meet Johnnie Hulse at the edge of the hearthrug.

"How do you do?" she said stiffly, holding out her trifling hand.

"My dear!" Johnnie Hulse responded, in quick, generous comradeship, and took her hand politely in his large, pale, hairy one. His smile embraced her. Upon the least sign of encouragement or even acquiescence from her he would have picked her up in his arms and by degrees kissed her; he was an impassioned defender of children, and a subscriber to the S.P.C.C. But she averted her eyes, and drew off. Her greeting was the minimum of politeness. She looked at her mother and then at me, and perceiving that she had not enchanted her mother by this chilliness toward Captain Hulse, she came to me, and permitted herself to be perched on my knees. She and I were now bound together by the sinister secret of the vase. Her body was still all warm with sleep.

We could not maintain a conversation about death in presence of Edith; and Mary began to discuss the question of holidays, saying that I in particular needed a change, not to speak of Edith. And she referred to Edith's tastes in the matter of pleasure resorts, trying obviously to get Edith to talk. But Edith would not be drawn from her reserve. Mary was the mother now, as well as the woman in love. She sought to reconcile the two rôles. It was a most wonderful sight to see these contrary winds blowing across her features. She wanted to recommend Johnnie Hulse to her daughter, and yet she knew that recommendation would be useless and that Edith's feelings alone would guide her. And Mary's clear conviction that Johnnie must of necessity be at once captivated by the charm of Edith,—this conviction was almost pathetic in its simplicity.

Then tea was served. Mary talked, and Johnnie talked; and I talked a little. Edith ate solemnly, sharing my tea, and using my saucer as a base of supplies. I felt that if only my vision had been keener, I could have descried Mary's unuttered appeal to Johnnie Hulse: "Can't you make friends with her?"

When tea was nearly over, I said casually to Edith:

"He's all right, isn't he?"

"Who?

I indicated Johnnie with a discreet jerk of the head.

She nodded. She had been watching him intently, and listening, but with the detached, impartial mien of a Chief Justice.

"Well," I said, "go and take his cup; he's finished.... Will you?"

She brought her legs and back into a straight line, and slid down and obeyed.

"May I take your cup?" she asked him.

He was still standing.

"That's very kind of you," he said. "I was just going to put it on the mantelpiece. Will you put it on the mantelpiece?" He gave her the cup.

"I can't reach," she piped.

"Oh, yes," he said, and lifted her, the cup rattling in his saucer as he did so; and she reached the mantelpiece.

She laughed shortly, for a sign that she was prepared to accept him provisionally on his merits. And within half a minute they were seated on the same chair. Mary's relief was childlike, painful in its obviousness.

Soon afterwards Mary announced that she must go, on account of Edith. She was content, and she wanted to depart in the mood of contentment. She felt, no doubt, her sensations sufficed for one day. Johnnie suggested that he and I should drive them to the station and then take a turn in the park. The ladies, with equal primness, retired to make each other ready.

Johnnie and I stood silent together.

"Look here, man!" he said suddenly. "I'm not going to say anything to you in the sympathetic line. Not necessary, and I can't do it! You know me, and I know you. And that's enough. Eh?"

I assented with a gesture.

I was startled by a little wave of emotion that expressed itself by a touch of his hand on my shoulder.

"Perhaps some day we may talk about things," he muttered. "But it'll have to come by itself."

Undoubtedly he was profoundly moved.

"Yes," I said.

Chapter XL: The Disappearance

At half-past six in the morning as usual, I went forth out of the house, by the little wicket set in the large double-portals, and idled in the sunshine of the street until the Fontainebleau postman, chiefly attired in pale linen, came down past the Palace from the head post-office.

This transmigration to Fontainebleau seems sudden to you, and it seemed sudden to me. The fact was that, in my indifference, I had become the sport of Mary. August was nearly upon us, and Mary, owing to a variety of causes, had made no definite arrangements for her holiday and Edith's. In the discussion of this question, on our way to the station after my first meeting as a widower with Johnnie Hulse, Johnnie had happened to mention Fontainebleau. During his stay in Paris he had been down to Fontainebleau, and had seen a furnished house there which was picturesque and highly inconvenient. It stood, the next habitation to the Palace, adjoining the Palace, and was to be had for sixty pounds for the season. Mary appeared to decide in an instant, in the cab itself, that she would take that house, if it was still available. Whenever she was with Johnnie, a sort of recklessness, a mood of brusque resolutions, took possession of her; and certainly what he said had

a strange influence over her. It chanced that neither she nor I had been to Fontainebleau. Therefore I was to accompany her. A change was imperative for me, I was told. Moreover, Edith had a French nurse. (She had already had a German and was soon to have an Italian attendant, so that she might be talkative in the principal European tongues before ever hearing the sinister word 'syntax.') This nurse would obviously be very useful on a French holiday. Further, this nurse was a good creature, and it would be a pleasure to give her pleasure, and she could not fail to be delighted by the prospect of a visit to her native land. Everything conspired. By the time we reached the station we were practically, in Mary's mind, already installed at Fontainebleau. I acquiesced. It diverted me to see Mary feverish and precipitate. At the station Johnnie telegraphed to Fontainebleau. In six days we were at Fontainebleau, together with our cutlery and other furnishings of a furnished house.

It seemed a large mysterious house, from the street. To the left of the double-portals the brass and copper utensils of the kitchen gleamed through a window. To the right was the dining-room; on the first floor a whole row of windows, and above that a series of very picturesque red dormers. The double portals, richly carved, gave access to the porte-cochère, a kind of tunnel cut through the house, and at the other extremity of the tunnel was a courtyard leading to a garden. The high wall of the Palace itself shut in the garden on one side, and on the other were tall, yellowish-green and bluish-green trees that curved upwards and formed a canopy in the sky. From the garden, too, the house seemed large, with its dozens of varied windows. And yet on examination it would only yield the dining-room, a large bedroom over the dining-room for Mary and the child, and some uncharted miles of passages that ended occasionally in a cubicle or so. There was no drawing-room, but there were two odd tiny rooms that could only be reached from the courtyard. One of these Mary denominated the bathroom, for there was no bathroom and no bath. Happily the bath-house was in the same street. Edith's keenest delight was to see the bath come along the street, in a pony-cart, surrounded by copper pails full of hot water. Never before had Edith seen a bath in motion. Between us we must have taxed the resources of the bath-house to the utmost. The bath-man in his striped apron seemed to be eternally crossing our courtyard with a copper bucket at the end of one arm, and the other arm sticking out

horizontally in the air. And the cost was ruinous. Mary was even more childlike than Edith. She found the house perfect, and each discovery of inconveniences was a joy. Within a week we felt as though we had been living in that house through ages of endless summer. Johnnie Hulse visited the house in order, as it was said, to satisfy himself that we had fallen on our feet. He was now openly and obviously in love with Mary. He stayed three days, and ate every meal with us, and then without any warning to me he departed. I knew not what had passed between him and Mary, but I knew that something had passed. So far as I was aware, he did not write to her, nor she to him.

Now on this morning, which was a Sunday, the linen-clad postman gave me one letter only—not even a newspaper—and the letter was addressed to Mary in Johnnie Hulse's hand. I sent it upstairs on her coffee-tray. And then, after I had my coffee in the garden, I started for my walk about the town.

In the Rue Grande black-aproned girls were arranging picture postcards, toys, pens, crockery, carvings, glass—all kinds of worthless souvenirs of the pleasure-city—on benches in front of the big shops; soldiers were hurrying to and fro on errands; an immense dustcart with its bell and shoutings passed from door to door; the newspaper tram jolted along full of newspapers as fresh as fruit; a few people emerged from the church, whose bell was ringing. The sun was slanting strongly upon the early and fresh calmness of the town, to change the confused opalescent colouring of its vistas into crude whites and yellows under a deep blue sky. The day announced itself as torrid and windless. And the workers were already shrinking from its menace. Awnings began to flutter out everywhere like bunting. I crossed the town and dived into the thick encircling forest. The letter occupied my thoughts. It was as if I still carried it in my pocket. My impression had been that Johnnie Hulse and Mary had passed through a more or less emotional interview at which she had enjoined him to leave her and not to write. For if he had not been advised or commanded to refrain from writing he would assuredly have written earlier. But I could only guess. Between Mary and me, Johnnie had scarcely been referred to. Each of us was afraid of the sound of his name. And the silence concerning him was ominous of dramatic events passing in secret, hidden from me. The letter exasperated my curiosity.

When I returned through the town the Rue Grande had awakened into full activity. The black-aproned girls were standing at attention before the wares of their masters. Brakes loaded with bright frocks rattled heavily about. The electric cars threaded past each other at the loops. From the open doors of the church came the distant gleam of stained glass and the sound of an organ. High Mass was in process. And everywhere in the streets the ground spaces were divided into sharply contrasting areas of glaring shine and dark shadow. At our double portals in the secluded Rue d'Avon Mary and Edith, dressed with superlative elaboration, each under a sunshade, and seeming to be inordinately typical of the British race, stood waiting. It was for me that they were waiting.

We had been advised that High Mass at the Church of St. Louis in the height of the season was a 'sight,' a spectacle comprising a collection of elegances and absurdities from Paris and elsewhere that was worthy to be seen by Britons. And on the previous evening it had been arranged that we should assist at the *sortie*.

There was self-consciousness in Mary's glance.

"So you are going?" I said.

"Of course," said Mary, rather curtly, as though my idea that anything could have occurred to alter her mind was offensive to her. "We shall be late."

"Oh, no!" I said. "It's only a quarter to eleven, and it won't be over till eleven. A quarter of an hour of it will be all you'll need."

During the brief stroll to the church, not a word from Mary as to the letter! Nevertheless the fact of the letter was written all over her face, and it came out also in all the tones of her voice. Edith detected the unusual, absorbed it and reproduced it.

The church was full nearly to the doors. Across a long perspective of heads and diminishing arches we saw a resplendent enclosure in which brocaded figures attitudinised in ritual before a lofty altar upon which garishly tinted windows threw shades of colour. A bell rang in the distance occasionally, and an organ sounded brokenly from somewhere, or vague voices echoed in the hushed spaces of the interior. In front of us stood an enormous hatted and uniformed beadle with a mighty staff. An expectant silence, and then the beadle imperiously crashed his staff on the stone floor and every head was bent in obedience to the signal.

The bell rang distantly. I looked around in search of the elegances, and saw none. The congregation was diverse, and in a corner were the white wings of nuns' caps picturesquely floating over the grey frocks of an orphanage; but I could discern no exaggeration of fashion. Then a woman swept into the church, followed by a little collared boy and a stoutish man with a rosette in his button-hole. Here was fashion! The dark hat, the waist-line, the fall of the pale skirt, the cosmetics, spoke it. Every contour spoke it. The woman went as in a trance to the vessel of holy water, dipped her finger, touched with her wet finger the finger of the boy, and simultaneously they made on themselves the sign of the cross. The gesture was accomplished with the swift, absent-minded perfunctoriness that only comes of years and years of use. She was a little hot, and she glanced frowningly at her husband, who stood apart. She was extravagantly Parisian. She might have come down from Paris in a bandbox opened only at the church door. She was worth at least a hundred pounds as she stood. She put her lorgnon to her eyes so conscious of perfection and stared haughtily a moment at the mysteries of the altar. Then with a whispered word to her husband and a tug at her child's hand, she was off again, having shrivelled everybody within range of the disdain of those hard eyes. She was off again, in her pilgrimage through eternity. I alone perhaps knew where she was going and to what glories she would rise when she had escaped from the grotesqueness of her prison. Mary lifted her eyebrows to me scarcely perceptibly, to indicate her opinion that after that our visit to the Mass could not be deemed vain.

"Where is Edith?" she murmured suddenly.

Behind us was a little postern, showing the lower steps of a winding stair. The person least experienced in Edith would have known that the stair had tempted her too strongly. I climbed the stair, and came out at the top upon a gallery where a young woman in a white blouse was blowing an organ, and perspiring, and where a number of little boys in black pinafores and belts sat uncomfortably on benches. The secret machinery of the temple's rite! Edith was there also, ready to go up even higher, had she not seen me. She offered her hand in token of contrition, and we remained a few moments looking down from the upper masonry of the structure at the parterre of hats and the genuflecting priests and acolytes in the far distance.

When we reached the ground, we both saw Johnnie Hulse by the side of Mary, who was whispering to him, apparently angry, certainly angry. He had a motorist's peaked cap in his hand. She ceased to speak as she saw us. There was a new silence in the church. Johnnie shook hands with me silently, and he smiled at Edith, whose face was moveless. We could not converse at the crisis of the Mass. The drama of our lives seemed to hesitate while the rite of the temple was being fulfilled, and we seemed to me awaiting in fear its resumption.

My foreboding, then, was justified. The letter had warned Mary of Johnnie's coming, and she had ignored it. He must have arrived at the house soon after our departure, and followed us.

The service was over, and we passed out from the cool darkness into the bright furnace of the street. Opposite, the black-aproned girls were striving by their charm to sell postcards and views of the Palace painted on irregular slices of wood from which the bark had not been removed. A small orchestra was playing dances at a café. The pavements were everywhere busy, and the sun was the aversion of all eyes. The season of Fontainebleau was at full. We were under an obligation, it appeared, to go into the neighbouring confectioner's. After High Mass no visitor who respected himself could omit to eat a *brioche* or a cake at the confectioner's. The shop, odorous with fresh pastry, was already full of women and men that had settled on its contents like locusts. The confectioner, in her virgin apron with its artificial waist-line that curved downward below the umbilical region, sat on a throne trusting to the honesty of religionists. Mary did not speak, and even Edith was languid concerning cakes. Johnnie and I had to make conversation.

"You're coming to lunch, of course," I said.

"No, I can't."

"Oh! But look here!" I protested. "That's absurd. What are you here for?"

I glanced at Mary. No relenting sign from her!

"Really, old chap, I can't stay for lunch!" said Johnnie awkwardly.

I thought that Mary was achieving rudeness. It was incredible that she should not second my invitation. Nevertheless she maintained her silence, save to Edith. When we got out of the shop, the congregation from the church had entirely vanished, so that in our emotional disturbance we had missed seeing the piquancies of it.

"Well, good-morning," said Johnnie queerly, and held out his hand to Mary.

"Good-morning," she responded, with a grim compression of the lips.

I made no further attempt to pierce the mystery of Johnnie's arrival and of his departure. I decided to pretend that I perceived nothing extraordinary in his sudden apparition. Mary's icy resentment, his refusal of my hospitality, and the curt leave-taking. He quitted us, and no one mentioned him afterwards. We lunched, for the benefit of the servants, and Mary and I kept up a conversation the sole end of which was to convince each other by suavity of tone that our mutual sympathy was not merely unimpaired but strengthened.

After lunch Edith was put to bed as usual, and I also went to my bedroom on the second floor. It was not an afternoon for exertion, either physical or mental. I slept rather heavily, without meaning or hoping to do so. When I awoke—with only one idea in my head, the idea of tea— I wandered about the ground-floor of the house, the courtyard and the garden, which was beginning to be shadowed. I wished, as I often wished, to negotiate with Mary for an immediate tea. The cook, an arrangement of blue and red, emerged informally from her echoing kitchen to inquire into my uneasiness.

"Is madame in her bedroom?" I asked.

"Madame is gone out. With a gentleman in an automobile. Did not monsieur know?"

"When will she return?"

"Madame said nothing."

"You would be very amiable to make tea at once," I retorted to this blow.

Edith and I had tea, in the garden.

Chapter XLI: At Dark

"Mother has gone with Captain Hulse," Edith remarked suddenly.

"Did she tell you?"

"No, uncle."

That was all the child said. She was not like a child now. She had not the expression of a child, or the gestures. She ate and drank like a woman. She suffered, and her suffering was translated into an

exaggerated precision and carefulness of movement. She suffered without understanding. Jealousy was her affliction; jealousy of Hulse, whom she liked. She could have explained nothing, perhaps; but she could feel, and she could fear. She was wounded.

"We can't be expected to stop in all the afternoon because mother has run away," I said. "Suppose we go for a walk round by the Palace, just you and I?"

She assented, with an air as if to say that if her mother chose to be independent she also must be independent: a little revolt in her. She stood passive like an idol, under the great porch, while her nurse, kneeling, smoothed out creases in the gossamer white frock and straightened the stockings. We strolled slowly through the shade of vast courtyards and past the innumerable windows of façades that were a rampart against the sun, and under archways and tunnels with long glimpses of flowered gardens and water shaking in the heavy sunshine. There were crowds of people. The monument of centuries of desire for ever thwarting itself, the relic of futile and tragic self-aggrandisement, was so wonderful and prodigious that it drew the curious from the five quarters of the world. It was so immense, so permanent, that it defied even the strong descendants of its victims to rise and destroy it. It imposed. Impossible to believe, in face of that pile the bricks of whose gigantic chimneys alone would have built a town for philosophers, that desire was woe and self-aggrandisement a stupidity! The error persisted. I thought of the generations of occupants of that château whose fate it had been to illustrate supremely the unnatural folly of egotism for the instruction of generations that would not yet be born for hundreds of years. A fate surely deserving sympathy! And, wondering where in that particular moment they were, in what condition, in what captivity or freedom, I spent on them my sympathy. And there was the primly trotting child, in her fragile and spotless frock, fresh from the freedom of another plane, newly imprisoned in the old error, the prey of her own egoism; silently and proudly fretting because she could not monopolise the fellow-creature, her mother! And I could offer no enlightenment to the child; to enlighten would be a hopeless enterprise. But I could visit her invisible radiance with my soothing thoughts.

As, on our return, we struck into the Rue d'Avon, we tried to reassure one another.

"Mother's certain to be back by this time."

"Yes. Long ago. She'll think we've got lost ourselves."

But we were neither of us as sure as our words. We were afraid that Mary might still be away. And our apprehension was justified. We resumed our pretence of tranquillity. I, personally, was in no way alarmed for Mary's safety. I knew that she must be with Johnnie Hulse, and that Johnnie had control of an automobile. But I presaged no accident nor contretemps. What bit me was sheer curiosity. What baffled me was my perfect inability to explain to myself my sister's vagary. When the hour of Edith's bedtime came, we agreed that she should stay up for dinner and that if after dinner her mother had not arrived she should go to bed. She went to bed at half-past eight, still very silent, and contemptuous of her nurse's facile comfortings. I was now conscious of a certain alarm. Could there after all have been an accident? The household was deeply perturbed within itself. I went out into the town, to look for the face of Johnnie Hulse over a steering-wheel. I inquired for him at the hotel where he had previously stayed. Nothing was known there. I walked up and down the Rue Grande in the dusk. The flagons of the apothecaries threw reds and greens across the tramlines, and the trams passed like cages of light. Outside the restaurants and cafés satisfied diners were smoking and drinking. The same dances were being played in the large café at the corner, and next to it, in front of the big shops, the black-aproned girls, interestingly pallid and languorous after thirteen hours of burning pavement, were still by solicitation disposing of souvenirs. I returned home again.

"Has madame come?"

"No, monsieur."

"You can go to bed."

I sat in the garden under the waving plumes of an acacia and watched the onset of night until the garden-front of the house was black save for the glimmer where Edith lay. No sound, except the mysterious brushing of the unseen acacia against the high wall! Trees and sky were mingled in a violet gloom. I pondered upon the past and upon the future. Then, startling, the loud, irregular clang of the big bell! I sprang up. It was she, at last! I should know what had occurred to her! I hurried toward the house. But there were steps before mine in the blackness of the porte-cochère. The servants also had kept vigil. I heard Mary's voice anxious

and hurried: a question about Edith; then another about me. A lamp was brought from the kitchen. She saw me.

"That you, Mary?" I cried, halting.

She came out to me. I sat down in the cane armchair which I had just left. She took another similar chair. There was an iron garden-table between us. She leaned back in the chair, tapping with her hands on its arms nervously. I could not see her features at all clearly. What I saw was a pale oval, with the drapery of a thin, white veil about it, and below that a vague bodily form. A light moved under the porte-cochère, and the servants murmured to each other. Then silence and darkness away there in the house!

"Morrice!" Mary said. "I'm engaged to be married again."

My heart seemed to have received a dizzying blow. Yet I could not have been surprised. It was, really, what I had been expecting.

"I congratulate you, child," I said.

"I'm very sorry it's happened now," she went on. "I am, truly!"

"But why on earth should you be sorry?"

"You know what I mean," she said firmly, as if warning me against the unnecessary trouble of making pretences. "So soon after Inez' death! Less than a month! Morrice, I've often thought I'd like to tell you, but somehow I've never been able to—and I *can*, to-night!—— We'd none of us any idea how much you two were to each other."

I said nothing. Nobody knew the circumstances which had led up to Inez' death. The doctor alone was aware that my seizure had been the result of a quarrel with Inez, and the doctor was the very grave of secrets. The priest knew, of course; but the priest could not be counted among mankind. The rest of the world undoubtedly thought that Inez had killed herself from pure grief at my death.... Even Johnnie probably assumed that grief had entered largely into her motive.... In discussing the death with Mary, if ever they had discussed it, he had probably been in a position to agree sincerely with Mary's proposition that Morrice and Inez had cared a great deal more for one another than their friends had suspected.... Yet he must have had strange, strange feelings when the subject of Inez came up between him and Mary!

"Morrice, I'm frightfully sorry for you, and I'm ashamed of letting myself be engaged now. But——"

"I know how you feel," I interrupted her. "But it's quite wrong. How can your happiness make me unhappy? You're thinking conventionally; my child; that's what you're doing."

"I may be," she said. "I daresay I am. But I can't help it. And I couldn't help getting engaged, either. He's too strong for me!" She sighed.

"Who? Johnnie?"

"Yes. He's much too strong for me. There can't be many more men like him in the world. I never thought anyone would bear me down when I'd made up my mind. And I positively had made up my mind that nothing should happen between us two for at least three months. But he's borne me down. Did you hear him come this afternoon?"

"No."

"Well!" She gave a short laugh. "I had to go out with him, or I don't know what wouldn't have happened."

"Where have you been to?"

I could dimly discern her head shaking. "I don't know!" she murmured in a fatigued voice. "I don't know! In the forest. Everywhere! Morrice, I'm broken! I'm crushed and there's no fight left in me." She laughed again.

"You went off in his car?"

"Yes."

"And where is he now, may one ask?"

"He's gone back to Paris. We shan't see him till we get to England again. I *did* insist on that, anyway." Her tone showed a little triumph.

"Why?"

"Well," she said. "I did! That's all. I had to have my own way in something. You'll never know all we've been through this mortal day," she continued, fanning herself with a handkerchief. "Nobody ever will. Unless some time or other Johnnie takes it into his head to tell you."

"There's only one thing I want to know," I said. "Is it all *right*?"

"Oh! Morrice!" she sighed. "Don't ask me! I'm so happy! So is he, I do believe!"

The simple gushing candour of the outburst was girlish, quite startlingly so in a woman of Mary's age, experience, and temperament. Never had I heard such passionate tones from her lips.

"Give me your hand, then, child," I said. I, too, was unwontedly moved.

My hand groped for hers.

"Nothing will be said to anybody else for at least three months," said Mary. "That's most clearly understood. It's all very well to talk about convention. There's got to be some conventionality, for the benefit of the world."

(Where, I thought, was the ironic Mary?)

"What about the kid, then?" I asked.

Mary paused. "I've thought of that. I thought—supposing *you* were to give her an idea?"

The mother abruptly turned her head. The steady night-light faintly illuminated the window of the bedroom.

"I must go and look at her. Give me your matches, will you?"

I remained alone in the garden, with the trees softly swishing their branches against the high wall. I was aware of a considerable agitation within myself. The thing, then, was done. Do you surmise what I could hear in the heavy silence of the night? I could hear the cajoling voice of Johnnie Hulse saying to my wife: 'Will she be at Brondesbury to-morrow at three?' and Inez' reply: "Yes." Little more than a month ago, that rendezvous that destiny had interfered with! And now she was dead. And he was betrothed to another woman! The certainty that none but himself knew of his interrupted intrigue with Inez had strengthened the temptation to which Mary's passion had subjected him. The intrigue with Inez had been an error, an idle and vicious caprice. He had recognised that, I felt, before her death. He had regretted it. Destiny, in cutting it short, had been very kind to him, had made possible for him a finer and honester future. Was I to be unkind where destiny had smiled? Was I to punish where destiny had forgiven? Was I even privately to resent? Was I not to be loyal to the secret? Johnnie and Mary were caught together in the spell of a tremendous enchantment. It had followed Mary, and it had forced him after her, to overtake her; they were its victims. No more than to Edith would enlightenment have been possible to them. They demanded and needed naught but sympathy. What a marriage! John Hulse a stepfather! The obdurate Mary striving to mould herself to the shape of John Hulse! And Johnnie, accustomed to the softness of voluptuous acquiescences in women, schooling himself to acknowledge the refusing moral independence of an equal! A marriage exceedingly perilous, that might develop as well into a disaster

as into a miraculous good fortune. They must accept the danger. They and their friends must face it. They could not deny fate. I would not have had them deny fate. I respected too highly the qualities of power and intellectual sincerity in both of them, to lack faith for them and in them. I had indeed a sure faith that this ephemeral episode of their union, a point of fleeting contact between the eternities that lay behind and those that lay in front, would not cause them too much regret when they looked down on it from freedom. The desire which was to unite them would daily provide its own antidote of discipline. I understood them both deeply, past words.

A brighter illumination had now succeeded to the night-light behind the open window where Edith lay. I could hear the faintest far murmur of a voice. Later, the light went out entirely.

Chapter XLII: The Attitude

Johnnie's life seemed to be always agitated and violent. We had scarcely had five days of quietude after the upheavals and flights of the Sunday, when word came that he was ill in bed. The envelope was addressed to Mary in a strange hand, and within were a few vague pencilled sentences written by Johnnie himself. Mary was thrown into alarm, chiefly by the significant fact that Johnnie had not found energy to address his own envelope. The illness must, then, be serious. Like most capable women, Mary distrusted all nursing except her own. She feared gravely for the bachelor at the mercy of hirelings. In the course of the morning she departed for Paris, to catch the afternoon boat-train for England. She went alone. The matter was urgent; she must satisfy herself about Johnnie that very day. She was regretting now that she had exiled him from Fontainebleau. Why had she exiled him? She did not know. Nobody could discover a logical reason. Perhaps if she had not exiled him he would not have fallen ill.

I was left in charge of Edith. This infinitely precious possession was confided to me: supreme flattery. Mary did not think that it would be worth while coming back. I was to conclude the tenancy of the house and vacate it in order, and bring the multifarious luggage, the French nurse, and Edith safely to London. Mary's departure seemed to happen in a moment, as her departure from London had happened. Indeed, since her passion for Johnnie had fully seized her, Mary was a different

woman; often girlish, even infantile, and noticeably precipitate in her actions.

The intimacy between Edith and me increased greatly during the first twenty-four hours of Mary's absence. Edith was sad; but she made it clear by gestures and tones that I was not held to blame for her sadness. She desired to return home without delay. I consented. In any event I should have left within a week We travelled to Paris, after tremendous and intricate preparations, on a wet afternoon. My intention was to pass the night there and proceed to London the next day. At the Hotel Meurice she and her nurse had two rooms, communicating. It was the first time that Edith had ever had the exclusive use of a room. She received me in it, politely curbing her self-importance. She was much older than I was.

"Uncle," she said, after cautiously shutting the door leading to the other room, "why should mother go to Captain Hulse because he's ill, and leave me here? Supposing I was ill?"

Evidently the question was overripe in her mind.

"Well," I replied, "you aren't ill, and you mustn't be. Don't forget it's your mother's birthday to-morrow. You must be well for that."

"Is it?" she exclaimed. "When shall we get home?"

"Oh! about six o'clock"

"To-morrow night?"

"Yes."

"And will mother be at home or will she be with Captain Hulse?"

"I hope she'll be at home. I'm going to write this minute. But if Captain Hulse was very ill——"

"You mean she won't be at home."

I had not definitely promised Mary to give Edith an 'idea' of what was in store for her, but I had not refused to do so. If the thing was to be done it ought to be done before she saw her mother again, and time was short now.

"Suppose," I blurted out, "suppose your mother were to decide that it would be nice for you to have a new father, and—it was Captain Hulse? You *do* like him, you know. And he's a great friend of mine. I say, *suppose* she were to decide."

She gazed at me in silence. She asked for no further light. She put no babyish questions. Then the curves of her lips began to change; her eyes

filled, and she burst into sobbing. The nurse opened the door from the other room. I waved the woman away, and took Edith in my arms and sat down with her. She was certainly the victim of the circumstances of this affair. Johnnie was to be introduced into her home; he was to be forcibly thrust upon her, upsetting the delicate balance of her existence. It was she who would have to adjust herself. For years and years she would be compelled to suffer the influences of Johnnie's violent individuality. They might be good for her; they would assuredly be stimulative. But that was not the point. The point was that she had no choice in the matter. Various risks threatened her. At best she was to lose the monopoly of her mother. And she could only submit.

I tried to comfort her. Then I said:

"Come! If you go on like this, what will your mother do?"

"Let me get my handkerchief," she said, and slid down. "I'm not crying about—about that. I'm very glad—about that." She wiped her eyes, sobbing occasionally. "I'm only crying because it's mother's birthday to-morrow and I shan't see her till night, and perhaps I shan't see her at all. And I want to see her in the morning."

I quite believed that she had persuaded herself that herein was the sole cause of her grief.

"Pity, isn't it?" I said. "But I can promise you you shall see her when we do get to London."

"Can't we go to-night. When's the next train?"

"It's not like going to Harrow," I said. "There aren't trains every half-hour.

"Aren't there?"

"No! And the afternoon train's gone."

"When's the next? "

"The next is the night train. You'd be travelling all night!"

"But when should we get to London?"

"Before six o'clock in the morning."

"Oh, uncle!" she exclaimed, enraptured; an appeal in her eyes.

I had engaged the rooms at the hotel, and I was aware that Mary would not have countenanced the wild project of a night-journey for Edith. But I would not check that fine impulse of Edith's toward her mother; I could appreciate her subtle distinction between greeting her

mother in the fresh morning of her mother's birthday, and greeting her only at its close.

Thus at daybreak we were nearing England. The voyage had begun in fair weather and was ending as a storm rose; but Edith, wrapped from head to foot in a rug, slept on a bench. The boat swirled on a heaving, slaty sea in the dusk. In the corners of the sky hung a few expiring stars that the ragged clouds had not covered away. And there were the pale cliffs, jutting pitifully up out of the menacing Atlantic. The boat approached them with rebellious bows that lifted and fell and swerved and were constantly corrected by the watchful rudder. The lantern on her mast was as weak as the stars. From the cliffs there ran out a thin dark reef, finished with another expiring light, and we ran toward this reef. One felt that it was indeed an island which we were nearing; scarcely even an island, but something insecurely anchored amid the eternal threatenings of the ocean, something round which the tempests were never still. We sidled perilously up to the reef—a tongue of stone and wood pushed forth audaciously into the sea to save us. A cord, a mere cord, was thrown to us, and we clung to the shaking reef. The island had offered us such shelter as it could; Islanders came aboard to enhearten us in the windy and fatigued dawn. I picked up Edith and, the nurse following, carried her across a plank, and along the narrow soaking reef, balancing amid gusts. And islanders with fragments of white chalk put rough mystical marks upon our goods so that we might pass. Behind a small oblong aperture a wan girl with fluffy hair stood at a tiny counter to offer us beer in thick glasses, and tea and coffee in cups of granite, and hunks of bread. It was the gate of an empire. It was the welcome of the greatest empire. I yawned and smiled and yawned. I too was an islander.

And when we rolled across the floor of roofs into a London that was not yet awake I still had the sensation of being on an island insecurely anchored in a great sea. We were all huddled together on that bit of turf that raised its breast from the sea to encounter the winds; and we were doing what we could; and we called the episode life. We called it life, this recurring moment of captivity between vast freedoms.... Differences of class, of lot,—what were they in the immense perspective? We were all one. The eager, acuteness of my sympathetic understanding quickened my blood and made me forget fatigue. Mary was at the station. She had

been up all night, but Johnnie was better. She expressed surprise at my vigour. I watched the meeting of mother and child with joy. I comprehended them, in all the secret folds of their emotion. I succeeded in that because I wanted to succeed, because my joy was to pour myself into them and spiritually coalesce with them. I did not know what my activities would be during the remaining years of the episode, but I knew that by an intense and continual cultivation of this attitude toward all my fellows, I should avoid unhappiness. In such preparation I could possess myself in peace until the prison broke once more. Nothing else, beside the perfecting of this attitude, had importance. I was alone. But I had seen God.

The End